ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 2008

Haven't Seen You Since the Funeral

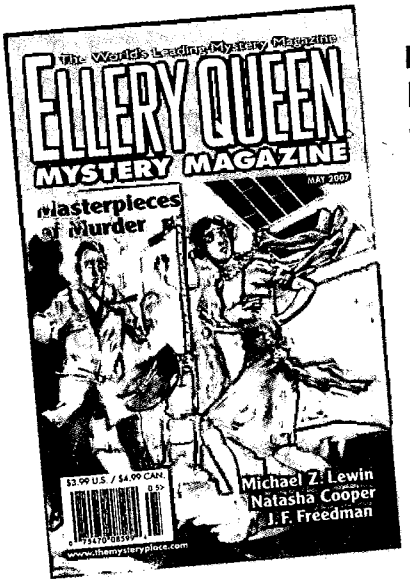
BY ERNEST B. & ALICE A. BROWN



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

6 Issues, Just $10.97!

Subscribe today and get 6 intriguing mystery magazines delivered to your door at 60% off the regular newsstand price!



Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine leads the genre in critical acclaim with more than 55 nominations and 22 major awards just since 2000!

Every issue delivers suspenseful stories from the honor roll of mystery and crime fiction's great writers PLUS mystery limericks, poems and cartoons, book reviews, and an occasional mystery crossword!

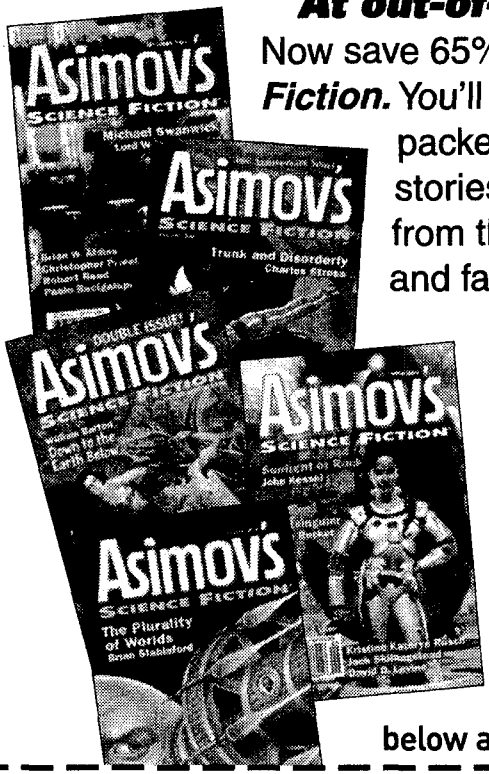
Order Today and **Save 60%!**

To charge your order to MC or Visa, call
TOLL-FREE 1-800-220-7443

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The SCIENCE FICTION You Love

At out-of-this-world Savings!



Now save 65% on ***Asimov's Science Fiction.*** You'll get 5 back issues packed with novellas, short stories, and guest editorials from the best science fiction and fact writers of today.



To order, just fill out the coupon below and mail with your payment today.

DELL MAGAZINES
Suite SM-100, 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855-1220

☑ **YES!** Please send me my **Asimov's Science Fiction Value Pack**. I get 4 back issues for just $6.95 plus $2 shipping and handling ($8.95 per pack, U.S. funds). My payment of $_____ is enclosed. (IAPK05)

Name: _____
(Please print)

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ **ZIP:** _____

Please make checks payable to Dell Magazines Direct. Allow 8 weeks for delivery. Magazines are back issues shipped together in one package. To keep prices low we cannot make custom orders. Add $4 additional shipping and handling for delivery outside the U.S.A. Offer expires 9/30/08.

28C-NN5VL1

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE®

December 2008

Cover by Doug Gray

CONTENTS

FICTION

4 GUILT by Gilbert M. Stack

25 HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE THE FUNERAL by Ernest B. and Alice A. Brown

44 COMES AROUND by Chris Rogers

50 THE PROPER APPLICATION OF PRESSURE TO A WOUND by Sherry Decker

60 GRAVE TROUBLE by R. T. Lawton

76 CARRYING THE NEWS FOR A DEAD PAPERBOY by James Van Pelt

MYSTERY CLASSIC

93 THE SIGN IN THE SKY by Agatha Christie

DEPARTMENTS

3 THE LINEUP

42 DYING WORDS Acrostic puzzle by Arlene Fisher

73 THE MYSTERIOUS CIPHER by Willie Rose

74 MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH

87 SOLUTION to the November "Unsolved"

89 BOOKED & PRINTED by Robert C. Hahn

106 THE STORY THAT WON

107 INDEX

Visit us online at www.TheMysteryPlace.com Indicia on page 111

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Banquet of Suspense

The end of the year is the season of surfeit—of candy and turkey, of gifts and fruitcake—so treat yourself to the helping of crime and mayhem in AHMM. With this issue, as by now you've noticed, we're introducing a new trim size for the magazine and a spruced-up interior design. We've also made our new(ish) feature "The Lineup" more prominent: See below for details on this month's authors. What hasn't changed is the lavish variety of crime fiction we dish up, direct to your mailbox, with each issue.

We're delighted to share some good news: Two AHMM stories have been nominated for awards. Beverle Graves Myers's "Brimstone P.I." (May 2007) is a finalist for the Macavity award for Best Mystery Short Story presented by Mystery Readers International. And Loren D. Estleman's "Trust Me" (June 2007), featuring Amos Walker, is a finalist for the Shamus award for Best Short Story from the Private Eye Writers of America. Both awards will be announced during Bouchercon, to be held this year in Baltimore. Look for more stories by Ms. Myers and Mr. Estleman in upcoming issues, and good luck to both!

LINDA LANDRIGAN, EDITOR

The Lineup

Husband and wife writing team ERNEST B. and ALICE A. BROWN and their Boston P.I. Valerie Dymond make their third appearance in AHMM this month. They are finishing their first Valerie Dymond novel.

SHERRY DECKER'S short fiction has appeared in AHMM and also in *Cemetery Dance, City Slab, Dark Wisdom,* and *Space and Time.* She is currently finishing her first novel.

Booked & Printed columnist ROBERT C. HAHN also reviews mysteries for *Publishers Weekly* and *New York Post.*

R. T. LAWTON is a retired federal law enforcement agent. His story, "The Boldholder," appeared in the May 2008 issue of AHMM.

CHRIS ROGERS is the author of the Dixie Flannigan series (Bantam). Her AHMM story "My Finger's in the Light Socket and my Head's in the Oven" appeared in May 1996.

"Pandora's Demon," GILBERT M. STACK's last story for AHMM, appeared in the July/August 2008 issue. He holds a Ph.D. in History with a focus on the Middle Ages.

Western Colorado author JAMES VAN PELT's novel, *Summer of the Apocalypse,* was published in 2006 by Fairwoods Press, which will also release a collection of his short fiction, *The Radio Magician and Other Stories,* in 2009.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GUILT

GILBERT M. STACK

I rode up the muddy track through a low ditch until I came to the main doors of Sir Gerald's home in the village of Alving. It was a barely fortified wooden building—old enough to be recorded in Domesday Book—although it wasn't found in those pages. The doors were neither great nor large, and with the light rain, no one seemed to have noticed I was coming. Not even the dogs barked or howled.

I banged upon the wood with my clenched fist. "Open in the name of King Henry!"

I had to wait several more moments before a serving girl answered me.

The household knew in general that I was coming. The king had circulated letters patent through all of his shires informing his people that royal justices were being sent to them. What was more, news traveled rapidly across the countryside and these folk had doubtless followed Lord William's progress toward them. But this serving girl seemed neither to know who I was nor what to do with me.

"Go fetch your master, girl," I ordered, using French because this was a Norman household. Without waiting for a reply, I stepped past her out of the rain.

The building was really quite small, no more than three or four rooms, and from the lack of numbers in what passed for its hall, I estimated very few inhabitants.

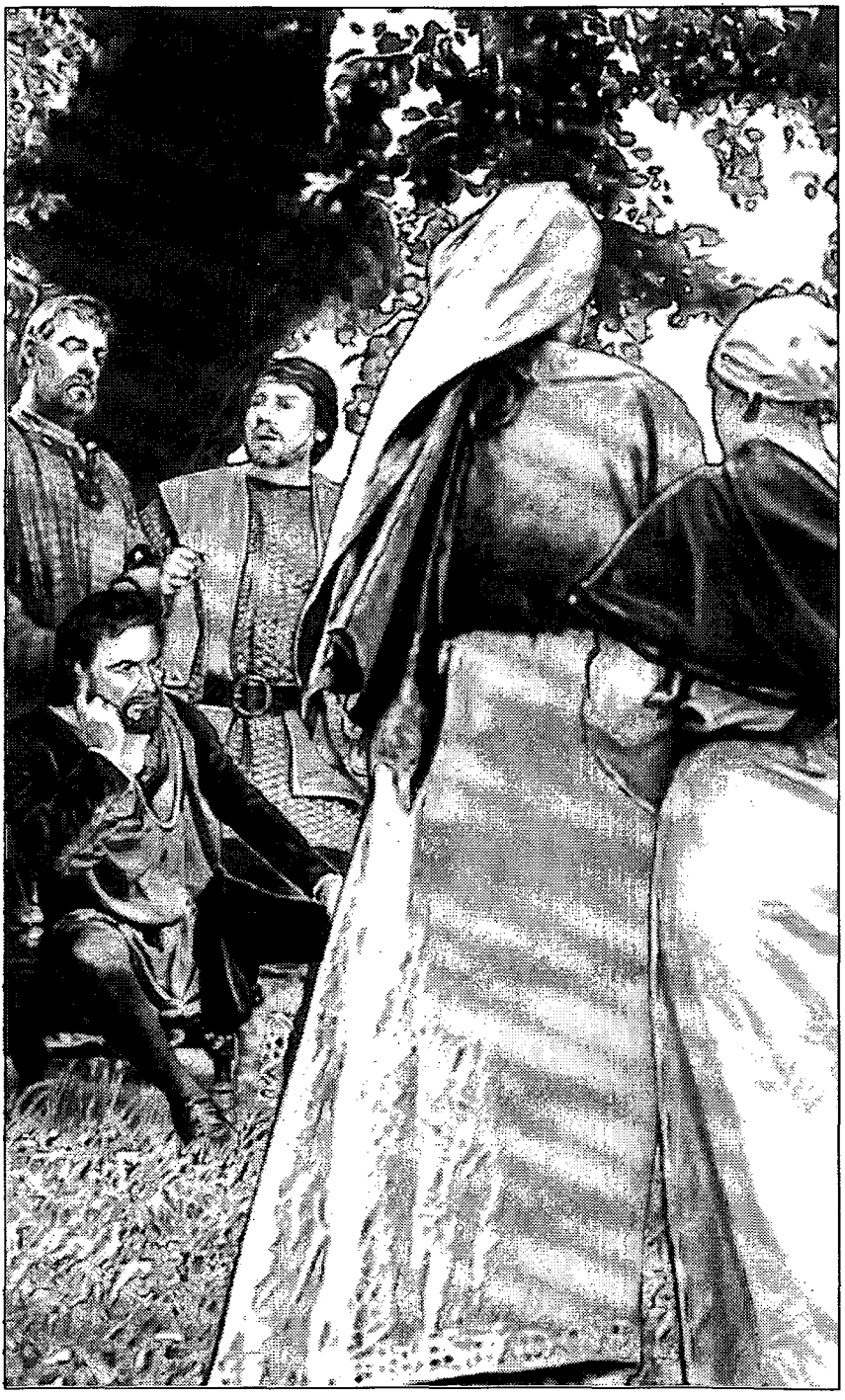
The two men by the hearth rose to their feet, a hound rising with them. "I am Sir Gerald," the older of the two men announced.

"I am Edgar, in the service of Lord Justice William of Kent," I informed him. "Lord William will arrive with an entourage of four by the evening meal. He will require lodging and food for his entire party. In the morning he will open the king's court and dispense justice on your local malefactors. We have much to do and very little time."

The muscles in Sir Gerald's cheeks flexed. "I, I thought we would have more warning. This is all terribly new. The king's demands quite—"

"The king's demands are the king's demands," I interrupted him. "And you have had months to prepare for my lord's arrival. Come now, Lord William can sleep in your room; his people here in this chamber. Now, have your juries been assembled? Have they investigated the crimes? We have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Ron Chironna

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

little time, Sir Gerald. Have a servant see to my horse and summon your bailiff so we can begin."

The man standing beside Sir Gerald stepped forward. He was Norman blond with a broken nose and was roughly ten years younger than the knight. "I am Sir Gerald's bailiff. You may call me John."

"Very good then," I said. "Where then shall we begin, in the village?"

John looked to Sir Gerald, who nodded his consent. "If we must," he agreed, then led the way back out into the misting rain.

The trail was slippery with mud and I had trouble keeping my footing as we wound our way down to the village green. "We have only one case of any importance," the bailiff told me. "It's a murder—a wife and daughter stabbed the husband-father."

"Did you catch them?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, they didn't try to run."

I had to wait for him to pick his way across a particularly sodden piece of ground before he would resume his story. "The neighbors heard him call for help but there was nothing they could do. By the time they arrived he was bleeding out his life from half a dozen wounds."

"They used a knife?" I asked. It was not the only implement that could be used to stab, but it was the most common one.

"A tiny little thing," the bailiff agreed. "It's a woman's tool, used for cutting vegetables when they're not cutting men." He grinned as if he had made a great joke, and I smiled to keep him talking and cooperating.

"Which one did it?" I asked, "the mother or the daughter?"

"They both did," the bailiff explained. "The mother stabbed him while the daughter held him back."

It was fairly easy to visualize. The daughter could have pulled at the man from one direction while her mother slipped up beside him with the knife. In my experience, villagers were usually right about these things. They knew their neighbors well and were often intimately familiar with their private business.

"Did he say anything as he died?"

"Garrick? No, he was too far gone. But we really didn't need him to name his attackers. They were standing right over top of him, covered in his blood."

"Why did they do it?"

The bailiff shrugged. "Who knows? He wasn't the best-loved man in Alving, but that isn't a reason to murder him."

"And the women?"

"Oh, they were liked well enough, I suppose. Well enough that people have fed them while we held them in gaol."

The first small buildings loomed ahead and now looked neither sturdy nor welcoming. "And is the gaol in the village?"

"It's their own house. We lock them in at night. It's been most inconve-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nient. We've even had to post guards to make certain they stayed there and we didn't get fined for letting them escape."

"Well, it will just be a couple more days now," I soothed the bailiff, "and then we can hang them, and matters here can return to the way they were before this happened."

The bailiff nodded vigorously in agreement.

"Now I would like to take a look at the prisoners and I'd like to meet with the jury and the oath helpers, if any. It's a rainy day, it shouldn't be hard to round them all up."

The bailiff nodded again, but with less enthusiasm. "Where do you want to meet them?"

"The biggest building you've got. It's where we'll hold the trial, too, if the sun doesn't come out tomorrow."

The bailiff scratched his head. "There really isn't any place big enough for the trial unless we use the manor house. For now, I guess we can cram you and the jury into the headman's house."

"That will do for now," I agreed. "Now, are there any more crimes for Lord William to pass judgment on?"

"No," the bailiff answered. "Isn't one murder enough?"

Lord William arrived with his retinue just before dark. I was back at Sir Gerald's home to greet him. The preparations were barely adequate, especially for a man of my lord's station, but we had endured worse since beginning this circuit.

I held the bridle of my lord's horse while he dismounted. "Welcome to Alving, my lord."

Lord William was a gruff man, but not above sharing the occasional pleasantry with his retainers. "Not as welcoming as I remember it," he grumbled. "This miserable rain has soaked me thoroughly. I hope Corbin has kept the parchments dry."

He turned toward the house and saw Sir Gerald waiting for him at the doorway.

"Sir Gerald," my lord said, "it's been a good many years. I hope you have a fire going and good food on the table."

The fire my lord would find. The food, unfortunately, looked barely passable.

Sir Gerald bowed at the appropriate angle to show his deference to the king's official. "I'm afraid this visit won't be as enjoyable as your last one, Lord William," the knight said. "We were celebrating Michaelmas then, as I recall. There's no feast planned on this occasion."

"No feast?" my lord asked. "Ah well, you can change that. I won't go back and report to King Henry that his justices did not receive proper hospitality. But as for Michaelmas," he added with a grin, "those were the days, weren't they?"

"We were younger then, Lord William," Sir Gerald agreed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"With far more time for having fun," my lord said. "Now everywhere I journey, work and unpleasantness await me."

"You have risen high," the knight replied, with what might have been a tinge of jealousy. "Won't you come inside?"

Lord William nodded his consent and a servant opened the main door for them.

The meal, as I have noted earlier, was meager, and Lord William was not hesitant about informing Sir Gerald of his disappointment.

"This will not do!" he insisted. "My people and I cannot perform our duties on such scanty provisions. Make no mistake, Sir Gerald, at breakfast and at all future meals, you will do better, or I will have my man, Edgar, here, do better for you."

Sir Gerald glowered at Lord William's threat. "There was very little time—"

"I will not hear it!" Lord William insisted, smacking the palm of his hand down on the table to emphasize his point. "You will do better!"

Sir Gerald swallowed his next comment and then tried another tack. "I am just a poor knight—"

Lord William cut him off again. "You will do better!"

Sir Gerald ceased to try and voice his protests, but his eyes clearly showed how bitterly he resented my lord's imposition.

"Now, Edgar," Lord William continued, turning toward me in a manner that suggested he was excluding Sir Gerald from the conversation. "What dark crimes await me in the village tomorrow?"

"Just one, my lord," I informed him, still noting the resentment on Sir Gerald's face. "It's a murder."

"A murder?" Lord William repeated with some gusto. "Well, that's something interesting, at least." He shifted his attention back to the knight. "Nothing else, Gerald? No property disputes or thefts to occupy me?"

Sir Gerald bristled under the implied suggestion that he was suppressing crimes from the notice of the king. "It's a small village. They're mostly good people."

Lord William harrumphed at that notion. We'd seen more than our share of the dregs of the kingdom. It affected our outlook on the rest of the peasants.

"At least it should be over quickly then," Lord William said. "Is the jury assembled? The oath helpers?"

"All is in readiness, my lord," I assured him.

"That sounds well," he said. "What do you say to that, Sir Gerald? We will have the trial tomorrow and hang the criminal the day after. You'll be rid of us the day after that."

"As you say, Lord William," Sir Gerald replied.

The sun was out the next day. By midday the ground would likely be dry, but I couldn't delay the trial that long. I was up before dawn to eat some

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

watery gruel and drag John the bailiff back down to the village as soon as the sun appeared over the horizon.

"We'll hold the trial out of doors," I told him, "here on the green. Lord William will sit here under this tree with his scribe and servants behind him. You'll need to find a chair for him—make it big and sturdy. That one he sat in at table last night will do.

"The scribe will also need a chair, although he carries his own writing board. I presume Sir Gerald will also wish to attend. His chair should be set halfway back from Lord William's to emphasize my lord's station and office. But it should still be close enough that Lord William can turn to speak to him. He may pretend to consult with Sir Gerald as a sign of the king's respect."

The bailiff took in these instructions without comment or expression. I kept right on explaining what needed to happen.

"The jury will stand over there to my lord's right. The accused will stand directly before him some ten paces away. Part of our duty is to make certain that they don't lunge forward and touch my lord, either in violence or in begging for forgiveness.

"We will want your village priest to say a prayer for justice and the king's health before we begin. Tomorrow, of course, we will want him to walk beside the women as we take them to the gallows, praying loudly for the salvation of their souls."

The bailiff shuddered ever so slightly at the callous way in which I had said this. I felt a moment of sympathy for him. "Have you had many hangings here?" I asked him.

"No," he answered quietly.

"Well, let me tell you what to expect," I said. "Today, the villagers will turn out to watch the trial. They'll probably start out quiet and respectful, but later it is likely they'll turn raucous and rowdy, especially if the trial lasts a long while. I assume that both victim and killer have a lot of family in the village?"

The bailiff nodded as I knew he would. Everyone was pretty much related to everyone else in a small village. "Well, we'll have to be prepared for trouble. Wear your sword. It looks bad if we let a mob kill the murderers before we can hang them, or worse, if we let them hurt Lord William or Sir Gerald."

"Does that happen often?" the bailiff asked. "The crowd getting violent, I mean."

"No," I told him truthfully, "it doesn't. Mostly they will see this trial as a spectacle—a wonderful chance for unusual entertainment. And tomorrow will be worse. They may even come in from other villages. After all, how often do you see two women hang?"

The bailiff shuddered again.

"It's a fallen world," I reminded him. "We each can only do the best we can."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lord William and Sir Gerald rode into town on their horses. They made a fine procession of it with Corbin the scribe, the two man servants, and the members of Sir Gerald's household coming up behind them.

The bailiff and I were waiting for them together with the whole of the village from the youngest bawling infant to a blind old grandmother. We did not have to force open a path through the crowd. The peasants were good folk—well behaved—and they readily backed away from the horses to make room for their betters.

Among the duties I handle for my lord, by far the worst is acting as his executioner.

I caught the bridle of my lord's horse and held it while he dismounted before passing the animal on to one of the man servants. John the Bailiff followed my lead with Sir Gerald and his horse.

Father Stefan, the village priest, came forward and blessed both men in Latin so garbled I could make no sense of it, but Lord William accepted the blessing as his due before seating himself with the same aplomb with which King Henry mounted his throne.

"Father," Lord William said, "your blessing on these proceedings please. Ask the Lord to guide us to justice as we hold this trial today."

Father Stefan smiled. This time he spoke in English and it was immediately clear that he planned to pray for a very long time.

"Father in heaven," he began, his voice rolling across the green. "We have gathered here today to weigh the guilt of two women who have sinned against this community."

My lord was very patient with the man—but then he usually was when it came to priests. He sat quietly in his chair and used the opportunity to examine the crowd. He paid particular attention to the group of jurors. The accused, of course, were not yet present. The bailiff had set two members of Sir Gerald's household to wait out of sight until my lord sent for them.

The priest finally concluded his prayer and returned his gaze to Lord William and Sir Gerald.

"Thank you, Father Stefan," Lord William said. "And now, Sir Gerald, I would like to meet the jury."

Sir Gerald gestured to his bailiff, who stepped up beside the group of jurors. "Step forward, state your name to the lord, and step back," he told them.

I had warned them that they would have to do this when I met with them the day before. I was never certain if the warning was a kindness or not. They all looked very nervous.

The first man stepped forward. Like the others, he was dressed in his festival best. "Hodge, my lord," he said, before awkwardly stepping back in line.

"Brett, my lord," the second man said, then realized he was still standing in the group. He stepped forward and repeated himself. For the first time this morning, the crowd snickered.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My lord watched these men closely as they declared themselves to him, studying their faces with care. For all that the outcome of the trial was a foregone conclusion, Lord William took his responsibilities very seriously. The jurors caught a sense of the true earnestness of the situation from him and stepped back impressed with the graveness of their responsibility.

When the last man had introduced himself, my lord addressed a question to the bailiff. "Are all of these men farmers?"

"Yes, my lord," the bailiff answered. His voice came out swallowed, much softer than I think he had intended, but with Lord William speaking, no one thought to laugh.

Lord William rose to his feet and addressed the crowd. "Good people of Alving, we are gathered today to perform one of the most solemn responsibilities we Christians ever face. A great wrong has been committed—a sin against God, our king, ourselves and Garrick, the deceased. Our king has charged us to identify the ones who killed him and punish their bodies for their crime that their immortal souls might still find a chance of salvation."

Not a whisper reverberated within that crowd. I had felt certain that at least one or two would call out the accused names when my lord mentioned the murders, but I was wrong. Lord William held them spellbound, listening intently to his every word.

"Our great king has charged the fine men of this jury to investigate this crime. They have already gone among you seeking a full understanding of what has happened. Today they will report to me their findings, call witnesses if they have them, and summon oath helpers if need be to swear to the character of those involved.

"Next we will allow the accused to speak and explain if they can where the jury has gone wrong."

Heads were shaking now, rejecting the very idea that the accused mother and daughter were not responsible for the crime.

"They, too," Lord William continued, "will have the chance to summon oath helpers on their behalf. But when all is said and done," my lord's voice boomed anew, "the responsibility for determining the verdict in this trial is mine! Mine to judge. And mine to render. And whether you agree with my verdict or not, whether you love these accused women or hate them, you will accept my verdict, for justice will have been done!"

Lord William let his steely gaze sweep the crowd once more, cowing these lowly villagers with the intensity of his glare. Then he stepped back to his chair and sat down. "Bailiff, call the prisoners."

The bailiff found his voice, shouting out his order at the top of his lungs. "Bring the prisoners!"

The crowd turned in excitement to see the women approach, but I turned my attention away from them. I had learned long ago that these were the moments that things went wrong. These were the moments—when attention was all focused in one direction—that evil crept in from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

behind. And while I didn't really believe I'd find an assassin with a knife, I had long ago trained myself to look for the unexpected problem.

So for that reason, I was positioned to see my lord's eyes as the prisoners were escorted through the crowd. They were solemn and serious, then suddenly tight with concern.

I twisted back to face the prisoners, wondering what had happened but could see nothing at all out of the ordinary. Most of the crowd was silent, knowing full well that these two women were condemned. Others jeered or hissed at them, including, I was sad to see, two members of the jury. But none of this was out of the ordinary. In fact, Alving was calmer facing its accused than many of the places we had visited.

I turned back to my lord, but his face was calm again, with only a slight tightening at the corner of his eyes to hint that something still concerned him. I might have been the only person present who could read that sign, but read it I did.

I returned my attention to the soon-to-be condemned. I had met them both the day before and there was nothing at all unusual about them. Peta, the mother, must have been pretty in her youth. She was dark as our shared Saxon roots, except that gray now streaked her hair. She looked much older than I judged her to be, but life was hard for all in these times. She would have been born early in King Stephen's reign, when anarchy ruled and armies fought back and forth across the land. The years since might have been more peaceful, but from the look of the village and Sir Gerald's manor, Alving had not been prospering.

Anna, the daughter, was a different story. She too had been damaged by the cares of the world, but those hardships had not yet destroyed her beauty. Almost blue eyes stared out behind a tangle of auburn hair, suggesting that Sir Gerald, or his father, had spent a few enjoyable hours with the mother. It was not an uncommon occurrence between a lord and his peasants.

"You stand accused," Lord William began with no hint that anything was troubling him, "of murdering the good man, Garrick, your husband and father."

"He wasn't that good," the older woman muttered.

"Keep your mouth shut, murderer!" someone shouted from the crowd.

"That is advice," Lord William continued, "that you would *all* do well to follow. I am a justice of King Henry and this is his court. Show respect and keep silent unless *I* speak to you."

Wisely, none of the peasants sought to challenge my lord's words. He continued, but instead of asking the prisoners if they pled guilty or innocent, he turned to face the jury. "Bailiff, have the jury present its evidence."

The bailiff pointed to the man who had first introduced himself. "Hodge, present your evidence."

The man stepped forward more timidly this time, the weight of his responsibility bearing down upon him. "If it pleases your lordship, we have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all questioned the people involved and agree that Peta and Anna killed Garrick."

"I'm sure you did," my lord said, his voice even more gruff than usual, "but what I want to know is *how* you know this. Bring forth your witnesses, and let them tell their tales."

This procedure was a little bit out of the ordinary. Normally, in the interests of time, my lord had the jury narrate events and then asked the witnesses to affirm or deny the parts they knew about. It was the way I had prepared the jury for, and Hodge now turned to me in confusion as to what to do.

I shrugged.

"The witnesses, man," Lord William said. He made no attempt to conceal his irritation at the delay.

"Yes, my lord, but . . . she's a woman."

"So are the defendants, in case you haven't noticed," my lord said. "Does this woman have a husband or father or grown son to stand by her side?"

"Of course, my lord," Hodge turned and gestured to one of the men in the jury, who stepped forward and called out, "Teale."

A woman about the age of the older defendant stepped forward and stood beside the man who called her.

"Just tell us what happened," my lord prompted her.

"I was working on the evening meal," she began. There was no hesitancy in her voice. She, at least, was not cowed by my lord's presence and the formal proceedings. "It was early still, and I didn't expect Edan or my sons back from the fields for quite a while yet. Then I heard screams—a man's screams—crying out for help from Garrick's house. So I ran next door and raised the hue and cry when I saw what had happened."

"And what was that?" my lord asked.

Teale shuddered as if in horror of the memory, but I could see by the expression on her face that she relished the opportunity to retell her story in such a public setting.

"They were all three covered in blood," she said, "Garrick, Peta, and Anna. Peta held the knife in her hands. Garrick wasn't quite dead yet, but I didn't try to save him lest they turn on me. I just backed away and raised the hue and cry and waited for the village to arrive and help me."

And that was just about everything the village knew about what had happened to Garrick. My lord heard several more witnesses—much of the village in fact, but they added very little to that original testimony. When the others arrived the mother and daughter were sitting over Garrick's dead body. Both women were crying. Both were soaked in the dead man's blood. Peta still held the knife.

The first attempt to question them was interrupted by Garrick's two brothers, who beat both women senseless with their fists. It was probably something of a miracle that they hadn't killed the women then and there and saved the need for this trial.

My lord, however, did not appear satisfied with this testimony. A thin sheen of perspiration brightened his forehead, which suggested . . . what? I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was troubled that I couldn't be certain. Was he concentrating? Fevered? Worried?

"And no one can offer me a reason for this crime?" Lord William asked.

"Lord William," Sir Gerald spoke up from beside him. "I don't understand the difficulty. Surely it is clear these women murdered my villager."

My lord turned to face the knight, eyes glowering at the interruption. "It certainly appears that way, Sir Gerald. But I am entrusted to administer the king's justice, and I am troubled that this jury provides me neither a confession nor a witness to the crime. Why would this woman stab her husband? Why would this girl help kill her father?"

"Because they hated him!" someone shouted from the crowd.

There was a general murmur of approval at these words.

"Now we are getting somewhere," my lord announced. "Why would these two women hate Garrick?"

This triggered another series of mostly worthless anonymous comments.

"Because they're evil!"

"Women don't need an excuse!"

"The devil works through women!"

When the crowd had quieted, the bailiff stepped forward. "If it pleases your lordship, Garrick was always known to be a bit freer with his fists at home than are most men in this village."

"Ahhhhh," my lord said, "so Garrick liked to hit his womenfolk, did he?"

"There's nothing wrong with that," one of the jurors shouted. His face was bright red with fury. "Sometimes you have to hit your women to keep them in line."

Several of the village men nodded in agreement. The law supported them as well. Short of killing, there was very little a man could not do to his wife or children. Of course, the wife's brothers might take an informal interest long before it came to that, but Peta didn't appear to have any brothers living in the village. Her relations were all more distant—and apparently less interested in her and her daughter's welfare.

"Indeed?" Lord William asked, giving the clear impression that he had never found it necessary to hit his own wife. "But I think we might all agree that, necessary discipline or not, regular beatings might be the cause of some resentment."

"It doesn't mean she had cause to stab him," the juror insisted.

"Indeed?" Lord William asked again. "Do you mean to say that if one of your neighbors were to soundly thrash you, you would not feel justified in using a knife to defend yourself?"

"Well, of course I—"

The juror stopped talking and glared at Lord William.

"It's not the same thing!" a villager shouted. Clearly the majority of the village men agreed with him. And so did the law.

"Indeed it is not," Lord William said, "but it is instructive nonetheless. Here is my problem. We have a dead man. Two women of his family are found over the body, soaked in his blood and holding the presumed mur-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

der weapon. Yet no one saw the actual stabbing, and the women were beaten into silence before they could tell what they knew of the crime.

"I am not satisfied. If they killed Garrick I might expect them to be found over the body. But if they discovered him stabbed and bleeding to death I would expect to find them there too."

"They were holding the bloody knife," Hodge exclaimed.

"But is that because they stabbed him with it or because they pulled the killing weapon out of their husband and father's back?"

The villagers were astounded, but no more so than I was. We had hung men on less testimony than we had against these women. Yet here Lord William was not only casting doubt on the evidence, he was handing the women a line of defense.

"They were found standing over the body," Hodge reiterated.

"And only they appear to know how they came to be there," my lord said.

"Why don't you ask them?" Sir Gerald intervened.

"Indeed," my lord said. "Why don't we?"

He turned to face the two accused women. "So what do you have to say for yourselves?"

They looked at each other for a moment and then the mother stepped forward. "It is as you say, my lord. We found Garrick bleeding to death and tried to help him."

"Oh, of course!"

Sir Gerald spat out the words in disgust, but I almost didn't hear them for the village had erupted in outrage, and one of the dead man's brothers leapt forward to strike the accused wife.

I intervened.

I didn't draw my sword, although perhaps I should have done so. Instead I charged forward and rammed the palm of my stiffened left arm hard into the man's collarbone.

He spun about, missing the women with his fist and opening himself to a blow of my own. It drove him back into the crowd and left me standing between the women and the villagers.

Their surprise at my actions began to turn to anger, but Lord William preempted any further action on their part.

"Enough!" he shouted. He was out of his chair, his face alive with rage. "With each act and every word you convince me that something is wrong here. Sir Gerald, I am most disappointed in the efforts of this jury."

Sir Gerald was on his feet as well. "Disappointed? There's nothing wrong with this jury's investigation. Find the women guilty and be done with it!"

"I will not be rushed to judgment!" Lord William shouted. "I will conduct my own investigation if I must!"

"Your own investigation?" Sir Gerald sputtered. "You don't have the power—"

"I am King Henry's justice of the peace. I have all the power I need!"

"The king will hear—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The king will approve!" Lord William insisted.

He turned his back on Sir Gerald and faced the villagers. "Go back to your homes," he said. "My man Edgar will be around to talk to many of you. Answer his questions or face my wrath!"

The people sullenly stood their ground, staring back at my lord and me.

"Edgar," my lord said. "Walk with me. We have a mystery to resolve and I will have the solution."

"I don't understand what's disturbing you, my lord," I confessed. I didn't like to admit this inadequacy. Lord William could be quite hard on men who failed him. But in this case I would certainly fail if I couldn't follow my lord's reasoning.

"Just find me another murderer," he said. There was a hint of weariness in his voice that did not seem to fit with the man who had just raged against Sir Gerald and the village. Where was the certainty that the jury was wrong? Where was the passion that drove him to stand up for justice?

"I believe the jury has found the murderer," I told him quietly. "It found two of them, in fact."

"It cannot be them," Lord William insisted.

"My Lord, I don't mean to be difficult, but will you explain to me why not? It is true that no one saw them stab Garrick, but is it reasonable to think that someone else committed the crime?"

Lord William turned to face me squarely and clasped me firmly by both shoulders. "It must be someone else, Edgar. Do you understand me? Find me another murderer for this crime."

"I—" I began to repeat that I did not understand, but suddenly I believed that I did. "Of course, my Lord," I assured him. "You can leave everything to me."

I left him on the edge of the wood and immediately began to trek back to the village, wishing only to know why Lord William wished to have an innocent man die to save these two women.

John the Bailiff was waiting for me at the end of the green, falling into step beside me as I strode toward the village houses. "Did Lord William explain the weakness in the jury's evidence?" he asked.

John was going to be a problem for me. How much of a problem remained to be seen.

"My lord William is not in the habit of explaining himself to me," I told the bailiff. "He gives instructions and I carry them out."

"And your instructions are?" John asked.

There was no way that I could tell him my actual orders. "To satisfy him as to whether or not the actual murderers have been caught."

"And why doesn't he think that Anna and Peta are the killers?" John asked, making no attempt to conceal his intense frustration.

"I don't know," I confessed. "My lord did not share that with me. Perhaps he is not actually certain that the women did not commit the deed. From

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my perspective, it does not matter. My lord has instructed me to reinvestigate the case."

John was not satisfied with my answer, but I cut off his next question with one of my own. "Did Sir Gerald tell you to stay with me while I do this?"

He nodded.

That might be a big problem for me, but it didn't have to be. "Are you going to let me ask my questions, or are you planning to interfere with me at each step of the way?"

"I want to understand why Lord William doesn't just hang the women," John said.

"Hanging is very permanent," I told him. "What harm is there in taking one more day to make certain of their guilt?"

"I just don't understand why he thinks they're innocent," John told me.

"Perhaps after we speak with your villagers we will both know the answer to that."

We began with Garrick's brothers, Aiken and Brand. Both were large and imposing men. Both bore influence with their neighbors. Both had been named to the jury which investigated their brother's death. Neither man wanted to speak to me or the bailiff.

"Why are you protecting them?" Aiken asked.

"Why not hang them and be done with it?" Brand added.

"Why did you beat them senseless instead of letting your neighbors question them?" I countered.

Their answers were completely predictable.

"They killed our brother!"

"They were murderers! We all knew that."

Yes, in my heart of hearts, I felt quite certain that we did know. If Garrick was half as volatile as his brothers appeared to be, it was easy to imagine what kind of horror life would have been like in his household. Usually the other villagers could act as a restraint on a husband's violence, but with two brothers just like him to help intimidate the neighbors, they clearly had not done so.

I doubted that there was anything to learn here, but I knew I had to try. "Where were you when your brother was murdered?"

The two men did not immediately recognize this for the potential accusation it was, but John the Bailiff did. He stiffened perceptibly and drew in his breath in a hiss.

"We were out in the fields with our neighbors," Aiken said.

"We had no idea Garrick needed our help," Brand added.

"And did you fight with him very often?" I asked.

This time the implication was so blatant that the two brothers could not fail to see it. Their red faces darkened further and Aiken balled his fists.

"Why you scoundrel!" Aiken said.

"We don't have to take this from you!" Brand growled.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I poked him in the chest with my forefinger, purposely goading the man. He was a bully, plain and simple. He wouldn't understand diplomacy, just the threat of violence. "Yes, you do!" I told him. "You will stand here and answer every question I put to you and if you are so stupid as to strike me, Lord William will break you and your brother with fines right after I break every bone in your two worthless bodies."

John the Bailiff deserved praise. He didn't agree with what I was doing, but he stepped up to my assistance just the same. "Aiken, Brand, you back off and get control of your tempers. I won't have you make Sir Gerald look bad by frustrating this investigation."

"But Bailiff," Aiken protested, "he's saying Brand and I killed Garrick."

"He's said no such thing," John corrected him, "but after this nonsense, he must be thinking it. You damned fools, I know you were in those fields when it happened and you've got me wondering if you could have slipped away and gone after your brother."

"You know it?" I asked, disappointed if it was true.

"Yes, I know it," he said. "I wasn't there myself, but I talked to all the villagers afterwards. You guessed right. Garrick and his brothers fought all the time they weren't making trouble for someone else, but just about everyone agrees that they didn't follow after Garrick when he left early to go home. And neither did young Oswin, the fellow who's sweet on Anna."

"Anna had a young man courting her?" I asked.

"Indeed she did," John said. "They were working their way toward an understanding."

"Garrick would never have stood for it," Aiken said.

"He hated that young scamp," Brand added.

This development took me by surprise. Rather than help prove the women innocent, it seemed to offer further motive to confirm their guilt. I couldn't quite mask the puzzlement from my face.

John saw it and smiled. "They really are guilty, you know."

I decided it would be wise to prove to him that it was not my task to push the blame for the crime on other shoulders. I wanted to keep him helping me. "It certainly looks that way," I agreed. "And if I can prove it to my lord's satisfaction, then they will surely swing."

"So are we finished here?" he asked.

"Not quite," I replied, before turning back to the brothers of the dead man. "If everyone was working in the fields, why had your brother gone home?"

"He liked to check on his women," Aiken said.

"Women get into all sorts of trouble if you don't keep a close eye on them," Brand added.

I glanced back to John to see if I had understood them correctly. His embarrassed shrug told me that I had.

"So your brother liked to leave the fields during the day to go beat his wife and daughter."

Aiken laughed. "That wife of his was a wild one—even before Garrick mar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ried her. And the daughter was looking to be just like her mother. Hell's fire, the village still talks about the way Peta went walking with that Norman knight when she was already betrothed to Garrick. It would make him so mad. He swore he'd never give her the chance to embarrass him again."

I thought about that for a moment, moving the various pieces of the murder about in my mind. I had a question now for John, but I didn't want these brothers to hear it. "That's all I want to know," I told John. "We can go now."

He turned to leave with me, but I couldn't help lingering at the door. "You know, murdering your brother was a crime and someone will hang for it, but I can't help but think this village is far better off now that he's gone."

"Garrick was the worst of them," John confided. "Aiken and Brand have been far easier to control without him."

"Tell me more about Garrick," I suggested. "I don't even know what he looked like. Was he dark and hairy like his brothers, or fair like his daughter?"

John missed the implication in my words. "Oh he was dark enough. The whole family is."

I now thought I understood my lord's concern, but I didn't know if I could find him a scapegoat acceptable to Sir Gerald and these villagers.

To record it briefly, we talked to just about everyone in the village and learned nothing further of substantial use to me. The men, almost without fail, were in the fields when Garrick left and no one remembered anyone following after him. Oswin, the young man interested in Anna, was there in the fields with the rest of them. What was worse, he was a likable young fellow. I might be able to twist things around to fit him for the noose like Lord William wanted, but it would not sit well with the villagers, or with my own conscience, for that matter.

No strangers had been seen that day so we could not push the crimes on foreign shoulders. In truth, I firmly believed the women had committed the deed, and while I might sympathize with them and my lord William, I could not see any way to save both of them.

Yet therein was the answer to my problem. I could not see a way to save both of them, but might it not be possible to save one? But which woman would my lord prefer to live? The fancy of his youth or the daughter he had never dreamt he had? And even if I guessed correctly, would John help or hinder what I was about to try?

We approached the criminals' house.

Garrick's brothers wouldn't like this. They stood to inherit their brother's land if both women hung for killing him. But the rest of the village? Would they be satisfied with a single death?

Hodge, the foreman of the jury, stood outside Garrick's house, keeping the women inside. I didn't want him listening to my conversation with the women, nor John either, for that matter.

"Bailiff," I said, turning to him, carefully in earshot of the foreman. "I'm

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

convinced the jury was correct in its conclusion, but I don't yet have the evidence to satisfy Lord William."

Both men visibly relaxed at my words. "There's just no one else who could have done it," John said.

The juror was shifting uncertainly from foot to foot, wondering if it was proper for him to enter the conversation. I waved him over. I would need his help in this as well if I were to be successful.

"This is very good news," Hodge told me. "I'm pleased we could convince you."

"I am convinced," I repeated for their benefit, "but I'm not certain my lord will be."

Both men frowned, considering this problem.

I helped them along with their thinking. "What I'd like to bring Lord William is a confession."

"A confession?" both men exclaimed.

"Yes, it would be difficult, to say the least, for my lord to deny these women's guilt if we could get them to confess it to him."

The juror nodded solemnly, but the bailiff's thoughts were already grappling with the practical problems in obtaining said confession. "I doubt," he said, "that Lord William would find it overly convincing if the women were beaten into confessing."

"I think you are correct," I agreed.

"Then what should we do?"

"I'd like to talk to them again," I said, "but this time I'd like it to be just them and me."

John the Bailiff shook his head. "Sir Gerald's instructions to me were quite clear."

"Just hear me out and tell me what you think. Lord William is the only man who has ever questioned that these women killed Garrick. I am his man, charged in effect, with proving them innocent. They may talk to me."

"Then they can talk with me beside you."

"I think that lessens our chances," I said. I dug my heels in on this point because I had no other argument. If John was as mulish as I, then both women would likely die.

Hodge, the juror, came unexpectedly to my assistance. "What harm can it do, Bailiff? He's already said he agrees with us. We can go and stand by that tree stump over there and let him convince the women that this is their last chance at eternal salvation. If they die unshriven . . ." Hodge cringed and left the sentence unfinished.

The bailiff faltered in his conviction. "I don't know."

"I'll tell you everything that happens," I lied.

"It will only be for a little bit," the juror said. He began to lead the bailiff to the tree stump.

I went up to the door, unbarred it, and stepped inside.

The two women, Peta and Anna, sat despondently around a small table as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they had when I first visited them. The daughter glanced up in fear as I entered, but the mother was either less anxious or more resigned to her fate.

I crossed the room and joined them at the table, sitting on a low stool that had probably once been Garrick's seat. Neither spoke, which surprised me. Most prisoners who expected to be condemned babbled forth prayers and pleas and promises. These women's silence was unnatural and must have been driven, nay, beaten into them over the years.

I cleared my throat. "I have spent the day trying to find a man to take this murder conviction for you."

"But you did not succeed," Peta said quietly.

"There are a couple of prospects: Garrick's brothers, your daughter's friend, Oswin."

This suggestion stirred Anna to speech. "No!"

"No," I agreed. "I doubt that I could even convince Lord William of their guilt, and he seems to want to believe that you did not do this."

They looked at me expectantly, correctly assuming I had not come here to tell them I had failed.

I took a deep breath. "I may, *may*, have a way to save one of you. But I will need some help from you before I am certain of it."

My words increased the fear in the daughter's eyes and brought hope to the mother's, but neither ventured to speak.

"I need to know what happened," I prompted, looking directly at the mother, hoping against hope that the woman would confide in me.

Peta swallowed her fears and licked her lips nervously. "It was as the lord said. We—"

"No," I interrupted. I did not believe she would tell me the truth about the murder, and it would serve my lord's purpose if she never told it.

I clarified my request, nodding in the daughter's direction. "I mean that I need to know about her."

The mother looked puzzled for a moment, then her eyes widened. "No! I don't want to talk about that!"

"Mama?" Anna tried to interrupt, but Peta did not stop protesting.

"I don't want her to hear!"

"Mama?" she tried again, tears welling in her eyes. "I know, Mama, it doesn't matter."

"You know?" Peta asked, apparently more horrified by this revelation than the thought of her coming death. But then, she had had months to prepare herself for her coming execution, and this was a secret she had clearly thought to take to her grave.

"You know?" she asked again. "How could you know?"

Anna got up, rushed around the small table, and threw her arms about Peta. "I've always known," she told her. "It's better this way. I don't want to belong to *him*."

I waited patiently as they cried, anxious only that John and Hodge might sneak back to the door to spy on what was happening.

When the women had calmed somewhat I started to question Peta again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I needed to be certain I was right in my assumptions or my lord might reject my solution to his instructions. "So how did it happen?"

"It is so hard to even think about now," Peta told me. "I don't think I can talk about it."

"If you don't," I reminded her, "both you and Anna will hang."

Peta sniffed. "I was so young. Garrick and I were speaking of marriage. He was different in those days—kinder and much less angry. Then the army rode through town and camped a while. One young knight paid a lot of attention to me. I was very pretty then and we went walking. I didn't plan for more to happen, but he was so insistent, and then the army left . . ."

"And you were—"

"I had to marry Garrick," she interrupted me. "It wasn't until after Anna was born that he really began to suspect. It got worse after that. He was always angry and very jealous."

It was somewhat worse than I had feared, and I found myself very disappointed in my lord. Not so much disappointed over his dalliance, but over his ignorance that he had ruined three separate lives for a night of pleasure. One man had died as a result of it, and now at least one more woman would hang. But these feelings of disappointment would not keep me from my duty.

"You know what you have to do?" I asked Peta.

Anna's mother closed her eyes. Her voice trembled when she answered me. "Tell me."

"You have to confess to murdering your husband and make a heroine of your daughter as she tried to protect him."

"No!" the girl screamed. She was about to shout more, but I was around the table and clamping my hand hard over her mouth. "Silence, you fool!" I hissed. "Do you want both of you to hang?"

She struggled against me for a time, but her mother threw her arms about her and stroked her hair until she calmed.

John the Bailiff and Hodge did not enter the house to investigate the brief commotion.

"I killed him," the daughter hissed the moment I removed my hand. "He wouldn't let me marry Oswin and escape him."

"I guessed as much," I admitted, "but the truth does not help us. If you tell that story I believe my lord will hang you both. Unless I am mistaken, you are his true interest here."

"He'd let my mother die?" Anna asked. Her whole body trembled with resurging anger. "Then I hate him too!"

I ignored her outburst. "If you confess," I told Peta, "then Anna lives, inherits all of your property, and marries young Oswin. She has a chance at the decent life you were denied."

"And will Lord William recognize her as his daughter?" she asked.

"I would not expect that," I said. "I think he will go away from here after the trial and never return again."

Peta did not consider long. "I love you, Anna," she said. "You have long

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been the only light in my life. I can die happy and hope for salvation knowing that you will live."

"No!" Anna protested, new tears pouring from her eyes. "How can I live knowing you died for my crime?"

Her mother only hugged her tighter.

"What do you want me to say?" she asked me.

We hanged Peta two days later.

She wept on her way to the gallows and so did her daughter and a very large number of villagers. The sun was unforgivingly bright, sparing no one—especially me—any of the details of the poor woman's plight.

Among the vast hosts of duties I handle for my lord, by far the worst is acting as his executioner. I earn a full shilling for each death, but I have yet to meet a man, no matter how grievous his sins, that I felt happy to hang. It's not clean like a death in battle, and it sets hard against my soul.

Hanging a woman is a thousand times more terrible.

It's not that I object to the penalty, only to the knowledge that if God will not forgive these criminals' sins it is my cold hands that are sending them straight to hell.

Peta's death was far worse for me than most. It wasn't that I thought her innocent. Whatever Anna had tried to say, whatever Peta confessed before the court, I knew in my heart that she had helped her daughter once the attack had begun.

No, what stuck in my heart was my lord's role in this crime. One thoughtless night and he had ruined Peta's life. Where the Normans came, destruction followed. My great-grandfather had stood beside King Harold at Stamford Bridge and died with him at Hastings. And here I served the grandsons of the men who killed him and continued to witness their poison spreading across our land.

We had no proper gallows to break Peta's neck, so I helped her step up onto a stool and fit the rope down over her head. Father Stefan made the sign of the cross on her forehead. He had already absolved her of her sins. A few more moments of pain and fear and she would be on her way to heaven.

Peta's eyes were wide with terror as I lifted the hood to cover her head.

"Anna will live," I whispered. It was the only kindness I could think to offer her.

Peta gasped and shuddered as the cloth slid over her face.

"Mama!" Anna screamed.

John the Bailiff grabbed hold of her and held her back. He had already been named her guardian and he had promised me he would let her marry Oswin when a decent interval had passed.

That was the only good thing to come out of our visit. The village and Sir Gerald had breathed a sigh of relief at Peta's confession. One death more than satisfied their sense of justice. Only Garrick's brothers had protested letting Anna live, and I trusted John would keep those two in check.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I looked to Lord William and he nodded. His face was an expressionless mask; I had no idea what he might be thinking. Was he remembering a few pleasant hours spent fifteen years ago? Was he relieved his daughter would not join her mother in death? Was he sad that he could not save both of them? I had served my lord for years, but answers to these questions were beyond my knowledge of him.

I looked to Lord William and he nodded curtly. I made the sign of the cross and kicked the stool out from beneath Peta. She fell heavily, the rope cutting off her cry but failing to break her neck. Her bound hands twisted terribly in a futile effort to reach the strangling cord.

Poor Anna screamed again, as did several of the children.

Others in the village freely wept.

Peta hung struggling, swinging, twisting, gurgling in a most ghastly fashion until the strength finally left her body and her spirit ebbed.

When her bladder finally voided, I knew she was truly dead. We left her hanging on the green—a terrible warning to all who would break the king's peace of the consequence of their action.

Lord William placed a hand on my shoulder, and it took all of my force of will to smother the impulse to shake it off.

His voice was a single notch above a whisper. "Thank you," he said.

The gesture was so unusual that I turned to face him.

The expressionless mask on Lord William's face was still mostly intact, but there was just a hint of emotion peeking out from beneath it, a tightness in the crow's feet to either side of his eyes.

"I'm sorry," I replied, leaving it to him to decide what it was that I regretted.

We never spoke of Alving again.



Mysterious meetings and readerly rendezvous are available in The Readers' Forum at www.TheMysteryPlace.com.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE THE FUNERAL

ERNEST B. AND ALICE A. BROWN

I'd jogged an easy warm-up pace past all the wharves converted into condos along Atlantic Ave, eased into a full run as I rounded the south end of Columbus Park, and was pounding back up Atlantic to my loft on Jackson when my cell phone rang.

"Dymond here."

"Valerie, is that you?" A man's voice. Hushed. Almost a whisper. "You sound so gruff."

Caller ID on the screen said: UNKNOWN NUMBER—UNKNOWN NAME. I slowed my pace and strained to recognize the voice. "Who is this?"

"Oh, don't slow down, Val," he said in the same hushed whisper. "You were just reaching your stride."

I did a quick check of the pedestrians around me. Back at Long Wharf, the seven fifteen from Quincy had just docked, and commuters were streaming through Columbus Park and pouring out across Atlantic Avenue. And almost all of them, it seemed, had a cell phone jammed against their head or tucked into their shoulder. But none of them showed any interest in me.

I picked up my pace again and spoke into the phone. "Okay, who is this? What's the gag?"

"No gag, Valerie. Been away for a while, just got back. Thought I'd give you a call. You look fantastic, by the way. I haven't seen you since the funeral."

Despite the warmth of the morning sun, a tingling dread at the nape of my neck turned cold and crawled down my spine. My father's funeral was the last one I'd attended, and that had been two years ago.

For half a minute there was silence on the line, then he spoke so softly I could hardly hear him. "Why so quiet, Val? I know you're there. I can see you're still holding the phone. And I can hear you breathing."

"This is getting kind of old," I said. "I don't hear a name in the next three seconds, I'm signing off. One . . ."

"Now, Val, there's no need to get so testy. That lawyer must be working you too hard. Maybe you should have stayed on the police force."

"Two . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right, Val, if that's the way you want it, bye-bye for now, but I'll be seeing you."

The way he whispered, "I'll be seeing you," sent another shiver down my spine. If the creep was trying to give me goose bumps, he'd succeeded. And I could still feel him out there somewhere, watching.

I snapped my head around to scan the buildings across the street, but all the windows were a blinding gold reflection of the early morning sun.

What the hell's the matter with you, girl? Getting spooked by some whispering weirdo on the phone who knows your name. I shook my head, picked up my pace, and concentrated on my breathing.

I got my rhythm back and started thinking. I had just cleared Columbus Park when he said he hadn't seen me since the funeral. And by the time he told me that he could see I still had the phone in my hand and could hear my breathing, I was almost back to Battery Wharf. To keep me in sight for that distance, he had to be running along behind me.

Or following in a car.

I spun around, running backwards, and checked the street behind me. No one, running or otherwise, was there. But I caught a glimpse of the tail end of an electric blue Dodge Neon as it turned off Atlantic Ave at Hanover and disappeared around the corner.

Fed up with the politics, the good-old-boy network, and the testosterone-laden air, I'd quit the Boston Police Department six years ago and gone to work as a part-time investigator, full-time secretary/receptionist, and all-around runner of errands for an ambulance-chasing attorney on State Street. And in three short years—along with more insight into sue-an'-settle litigation than you'd ever get in law school—I'd satisfied the State's requirement of "not less than three years as an investigator" and applied for my own license. That was also the year my dad retired from the police department.

He took early retirement eleven months after Sebastian Cass, a small-time drug dealer he had arrested, got shanked by another prisoner in county lockup while awaiting trial. With his sobbing wife Maria, who swore he was innocent, his sixteen-year-old son Angelo, who screamed police brutality, and a three-network media contingency at his side, Sebastian Cass died a week later.

There had been two other police-related deaths that summer—bungled arrests that ended with the suspects being shot—and the mayor, the media, and all five gubernatorial hopefuls in that year's election were pointing fingers and hollering reform.

For Dad, the incidents themselves were bad enough, but the daily hounding on TV and in the papers was more than he could stand. Disheartened, he retired.

Being on the job had always been Dad's reason for getting out of bed each day. And when he quit the force, he lost his sense of purpose and sank into depression. He caught a cold he couldn't shake that winter and wound up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in Mass General with pneumonia. And not quite thirteen months into his retirement, Dad died.

I didn't give my whispering weirdo much thought again until late the next afternoon on my way to a strip club with the subtle name of Bottoms Up. I had a subpoena tucked in my bag for a no-show witness named Ezekiel Jones, and I'd spent the better part of an increasingly overcast day trudging in and out of a dozen dingy strip joints looking for him.

The way he whispered, "I'll be seeing you," sent a shiver down my spine.

I'd picked up a tip that Ezekiel liked to spend a lot of time watching the ladies undress, so I'd gone online and put together a list of all the titty bars and strip joints I could find in the Greater Boston area. Bottoms Up was the last one on my list. It shared space with a cut-rate package store in an otherwise abandoned shopping mall tucked into a corner somewhere near the border of Everett, Revere, and Chelsea.

I'd crossed high over the Mystic River on the Tobin Bridge, and as I descended into Chelsea, I looked out across the rooftops down a line of stubby chimneys sprouting from the tar-and-gravel roofs like a row of tombstones, and remembered where I'd first served papers on the elusive Ezekiel Jones.

I try to go through the *Globe* and the *Herald* front to back every day, and I'd thought I was one sharp lady P.I. the morning I'd spotted Ezekiel's name as the sole surviving son in his father's obituary. On the day of the service, I parked outside the funeral parlor, followed the procession to the cemetery, and bagged Ezekiel as he and his mother were leaving.

But Zeke's mother proved pretty sharp herself. She had found out where I lived and was waiting for me outside my door the next morning breathing fire.

"My son had nothin' to do with that guy gettin' shot—" throwing the balled-up subpoena in my face "—an' no way am I gonna let you get him killed." She had the husky voice of a heavy smoker and the withering glare of an avenging angel. "He won't be showin' his face in no courtroom."

And I didn't have any better luck with the criminal defense attorney who'd hired me when I told him what had happened, either. He'd needed Ezekiel as the key witness for the defense in a murder trial and had hired me to find him.

"Were there any witnesses besides his mother when you served him?" he asked.

"No. No witnesses. I thought it might be just a tad insensitive to barge into the cemetery and slap the paper on him as they were lowering his father's casket into the ground. I waited outside until the service was over and grabbed him as he and his mother were leaving."

"But nobody actually saw you hand him the papers?"

"Just his mother."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So, when he swears he wasn't served, it's only your word against his?"

"Yeah, I guess, but—"

"Then you're gonna have to serve him again."

I'd not only lost the ensuing argument about why I had to serve the subpoena a second time, I'd failed to convince him he should pay me twice if I did.

And that's how come—putting in a long day for short money chasing down Ezekiel Jones for the *second* time—I happened to remember my weirdo on the phone again.

Down a ramp off the bridge into Chelsea. A row of chimneys like tombstones—

. . . *been away for a while, just got back* . . .

Caught up with Ezekiel the first time outside a cemetery in Jamaica Plain—

. . . *thought I'd give you a call* . . .

Came out of hiding to bury his father—

. . . *you look fantastic, by the way . . . haven't seen you since the funeral.*

I pushed through the doorway, stopped as it swished closed behind me, and let my eyes adjust to the gloomy interior. Along the wall to my right, a handful of guys sat drinking bottled beer with their backs against the bar. They, and the dozen or so patrons at a scattering of tables, were paying rapt attention to a small stage where a nearly naked redhead was making apathetic love to the ubiquitous brass pole. I headed for the bar.

Wearing khakis, a muscle shirt, and tattoos up both arms, the guy slinging beer at this end of the bar obviously spent a lot of his time pumping iron. Probably popping steroids too. But I'd have bet the farm he couldn't spell it. Without a doubt he doubled as the bouncer.

The other bartender—khaki cut-offs, a cropped white tank top, and a ton of makeup—looked every bit as bored as the redhead who worked the pole. I made my way down the bar and climbed up on a stool in front of her. The nametag pinned over one of her more than ample breasts read MICKIE.

She gave me a blank look. "What'll it be?"

"Beer's good."

"Bud, Bud Light, Miller Lite, or Coors?"

"I'll take a Miller Lite."

She pulled a Miller Lite from a chest beneath the bar, popped the top, and set the bottle down in front of me. No napkin, no glass. "That'll be nine bucks."

I'd done this so many times today that I had it down pat. I had stacked a twenty dollar bill, my P.I. license, and Ezekiel's picture together in my bag. I slipped the little bundle out and laid it on the bar with the twenty on top.

I was the only female patron in the place, and from the other end of the bar, Mr. Muscles was watching me with a snarl on his face that said *dyke*. I leaned forward, put my arm on the bar so he couldn't see what I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was doing, and with my little finger slid the twenty sideways so Mickie could see my license. She leaned forward, squinted at my picture on the license, then looked up at me and scowled. I slid my license sideways and tapped Ezekiel's picture a couple of times. When she looked down at his picture, I nudged the twenty toward her and said, "What d'ya say, Mickie, seen him around?"

She looked up and nodded.

"Today?" I said.

Another nod.

"When?"

She smiled, scooped up the twenty, and tipped her head toward the back of the room. "Dipshit's in the john right now."

I jammed Zeke's picture and my license back in my bag and hopped off the stool.

So, the cheapskate who'd hired me wanted witnesses. Okay. I grabbed a chair from an empty table and dragged it to the men's room. I yanked the door wide open, slamming it against the wall, and propped it open with the chair.

From behind the bar, a scowling Mr. Muscles jabbed a finger at me and yelled, "Hey!" But he couldn't seem to make what he was looking at compute. He just stood there with his mouth hanging open, poking holes in the air with his finger.

"Well, if it isn't Ezekiel Jones," I said as I walked into the men's room.

He jumped and turned away from the urinal, saw me standing there with the door propped open, and bent almost double getting tucked away. I stepped up to him, rolling the subpoena up lengthways, and jammed it down into his unzipped trousers. "Consider yourself served, Zeke," I said. "And the spooky phone call? Not convincing. Laid it on way too thick."

He stood there gaping at me with a puzzled frown.

I shook my head and turned to leave. "Careful you don't rip anything zipping up," I said.

When I walked out, Mickie was sipping from my Miller Lite and doing everything she could to keep from laughing. As I walked by, she pumped her fist and mouthed, "*Yes*."

I gave her a wink, shot Mr. Muscles with my finger, and walked out the door.

And even though gray streaks of cloud were trying hard to block the sun, by the time I hit the parking lot I felt like singing. I had located Ezekiel Jones and served him—within twenty-four hours this time—*and* thought I'd solved the mystery of my whispering weirdo.

I climbed into my aging Honda, coaxed the engine to life, and was adjusting the rearview mirror when I caught a glimpse of an electric blue Neon pulling out of a space a couple of rows behind me. I buckled up, backed out of my space, and took off after the Neon with my heart thumping in my throat. But by the time I made it to the exit, the Neon was gone. I sat there

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shaking with my jaw clenched so tightly my teeth hurt and pounded on the steering wheel.

I'd put in a hard five working the streets of Boston in a P.D. blue-and-white, another three tracking down witnesses and cherry-picking testimony for a trip-and-fall attorney, then the last three on my own ticket doing messy little odd jobs for lawyers who didn't want to get mud on their Guccis or muss up their hair. I thought I was capable of remaining reasonably cool, relatively calm, and fairly well collected. So why was I letting this weirdo push all my buttons?

I had crossed back over the Tobin Bridge into Charlestown, swung around up onto Rutherford Ave, rattled out over the upper end of the Inner Harbor on the antiquated Charlestown Bridge, and was sitting there stuck in traffic in the shadow of the soaring concrete spires and splayed cable-stays of the Lenny Zakim Bridge when my phone rang. I plucked it out of the cup holder without thinking.

"Yeah, Dymond here."

For a couple of seconds, only the hiss of electronic white noise . . . then the soft voice, "Val, you always sound so angry."

And in that instant, in one of those intuitive flashes, I knew what was causing my anger and why. The hushed voice, not being able to see him or know who he was, had touched on something primal, some primitive foreboding of unseen things that prowl in the dark. I wasn't really pissed off at myself or the creep on the phone. The anger was nothing more than a blind reaction to fear. And I'm not that easily frightened, either. But I'd let that hushed, disembodied voice on the phone get to me. Time to turn this thing around.

"Hey, Skippy," I said. "How's it going?"

Silence . . . then, "Don't call me that, Val."

"What do you mean, don't call you Skippy?"

More silence.

"Okay, so what do you want me to call you?"

"Come on, Val, I know you know who I am."

"Probably do, if I wanted to bother taking the time to think about it, which I don't. So why don't you give me a clue."

"I'm hurt you don't remember, Val. It's only been four years."

"Look, Skip, I've had a busy day and I'm tired, so get to the point. Did you call to play guessing games, or did you just get tired of pulling the wings off of flies?"

The couple of seconds of dead air that followed felt more like a couple of years. And when he came back on the line, the hushed whisper had taken on a nasty hiss. "You shouldn't speak to me that way, bitch."

"*Bitch*? Oh, Skippy, now you've gone and hurt my feelings. I mean, really. What happened to that nice throaty 'Vaahl'?"

The hiss became a snarl. "You will regret that; you will regret mocking me."

"Now, you're not threatening me here, are you, Skippy?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"To disregard the pain of others is callous," he said, "but to inflict pain is evil. And evil must be punished."

"What evil? I have to tell you, Skippy, you're starting to sound like an old Vincent Price movie, here. But let me give you—"

"Evil is spawned by evil," he cut in, "and you are—"

"Hey, Skip, give it a rest and listen up, okay? Making annoying phone calls, as long as it isn't deemed to be stalking, is only a misdemeanor. But threatening bodily harm over the phone is a felony. And if you think just 'cause you're whispering into some throwaway phone I can't find you, Skippy, you're dreaming. Finding losers like you is what I do for a living."

"Oh don't worry, Val," he whispered, "you won't have to find me. When it's time, I'll find you."

Despite my bravado, I could taste adrenaline at the back of my throat and feel the fine hair stand up on my arms. I'd had him pegged as a slightly warped weirdo, but he was starting to sound totally bent.

I scanned the cars in the traffic jam around me. He had to be somewhere close by. I could feel it.

I was looking from one side mirror to the other and back again when the guy in the cab over box truck behind me leaned on his horn. The traffic in front of me had started to move.

I hit my left directional, pulled into the outside lane for my turn onto Commercial Street, and sat waiting for a break in the oncoming traffic. The box truck rumbled by on my right headed up Washington Street. And there it was, a couple of car lengths behind him, the electric blue Neon. He was stuck in the middle lane between the line of cars behind me waiting to turn left, and the line on the other side of *him* waiting to turn right. He had nowhere to go but straight ahead.

He punched the gas, shot out into the intersection, but had to jump on the brakes to avoid slamming into the rear end of the slow-moving box truck. He pulled out to the left to get by the truck. No room. Just a blaring of horns from oncoming traffic. He swerved all the way back to the right, flew up the handicap cut in the curb at the corner, bounced up onto the sidewalk, and barreled past the box truck in a cloud of sparks and red brick dust gouged off the buildings on his right.

On the sidewalk halfway down the block, a bag lady in a tattered, gray, ankle-length dress and black high-tops let go of her shopping cart and threw both arms up in front of her face. With barely ten feet to go before hitting her, the Neon cut left, plowed over a parking meter that exploded and spewed a fountain of coins in the air, bounced down over the curb in front of the box truck, and hightailed it up Washington Street toward Haymarket Square.

Instead of turning left, I drove straight ahead through the intersection and pulled over by the remains of the parking meter. I dug out a notepad and pen, and while the bag lady scurried around on her hands and knees scooping up quarters and cackling with glee, I jotted down the first four digits I'd gotten off the Neon's license plate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I flipped open my cell, scrolled down through CONTACTS to LENIHAN, and hit SEND.

I'd met Sergeant Detective Lenihan a few months back when he had been the primary on what had started as an incident of shoplifting, but ended with the manager of the shop dead on the floor. Unfortunately, the manager had been one of three Newbury Street merchants who had hired me to protect them from shoplifters. With a little help from me and a lot of luck, Lenihan had closed the case in less than twenty-four hours. And me? No, I didn't get any shoplifters. I got canned.

I had to work my way through three or four variations of "Homicide" . . . "Who?" . . . "Oh, Lenihan, yeah, he's here somewhere, hang on, I'll get him," before he finally came on the line and growled, "Lenihan here."

"You ever had the bianco pizza at Nicolai's?" I said.

"What? . . . what's that?"

"Caramelized onion, prosciutto, and parmesan cream."

He only missed a couple of beats, then he let out a long sigh. "Ah yes, Valerie Dymond, my favorite lady gumshoe."

"Wow. You remembered me? I'm flattered."

All I got for an answer on that was, "Umm."

"But favorite, you say, huh? How many lady gumshoes do you know, anyhow? And that should really be *woman* gumshoe, by the way. Nobody uses lady as a modifier anymore."

"'Lady as a modifier?' And you wonder how come I remember you? But you are the only one I know, Val. And one of you is more than enough. So what d'ya want?"

"What makes you think I want something? Maybe I just wanted to know how you've been, see if you'd like to shoot out after work for pizza and a couple a cold ones."

"Not buyin' that. Some snazzylookin' young, ahh, *woman* P.I. calls askin' a worn-out old cop like me out for pizza, I know it ain't my company she's lookin' for."

"Young and snazzylooking? You silver-tongued devil, you. But I'm not that young, Lenihan. And for that matter, you're not that old."

He paused just long enough before he answered to make me wonder what he was thinking. And to wonder why the hell I'd even said it.

"What I have," I said, hoping the flush on my face didn't show in my voice, "is a partial plate number. What I need is a list of possibles."

"Jesus, Val, you know I can't do that. You been readin' too much Parker."

"Okay, okay, scrub the bianco pizza. You ever had their pasta primavera?"

"You trying to bribe a police officer?"

"Absolutely, yes."

"Look, Val, you're not on the job anymore, and you—"

"Come on, Lenihan, you know I wouldn't be bugging you with this if it wasn't something heavy. Some sicko's been harassing me with anonymous

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

phone calls and following me around in his car. And this afternoon I finally got the first four digits off his plate."

Silence. Another deep sigh, then, "Okay, give me what you got."

"It's an electric blue Dodge Neon, no more than two years old, Mass plate, first four digits: 2-R-T-4."

He repeated the make, year, color, and partial plate.

"That's it," I said. "How long will it take to put together a list of possibles?"

"It'll take longer to get through to someone at the Registry of Motor Vehicles than it'll take their computer to spit out the list. Call me back in a half an hour."

"No, I meant it about the pizza and a couple of cold ones. You working the eight-to-four?"

"Yeah, supposedly."

I glanced at my watch. It was almost five o'clock. "So why don't you sign out as soon as the list comes through and bring it over to Nicolai's."

I could hear him tapping on the desk as he thought it over. "We talking Nicolai's on Prince Street?"

"Yes," I said, "and I'm buying."

"Okay, but I need at least another hour here to wrap up a couple of things. See you there about seven."

I was sipping a Sam Adams at the far end of the bar—one eye on the second inning of a Sox and Yankees night game at Fenway on the forty-two-inch plasma and one eye on the front door—when Lenihan walked in.

Despite sloping shoulders and a tendency to slouch, weighing in at two-fifty and topping six and a half feet, he's a commanding presence anywhere short of an NFL locker room. His fashion presence, however, is something else again. Decked out tonight in a shapeless tweed sport coat with leather-patched elbows, faded blue jeans, and scuff-toed brown loafers, there wasn't a chance he was going to make this year's list of the ten best-dressed men in Boston. But all that aside, there was some little-boy-inside-a-grizzly-bear-suit thing about him I found disconcertingly arousing.

Without breaking stride, he gave the place that casual once-over that all but screams badge, shot me a quick smile that made his slate blue eyes crinkle at the outside edges, and ambled down along the bar in my direction.

He looked down at me and ran a huge hand through his iron gray hair. "How's it goin', Slim?"

"Hey, Lenihan." I got up and gave him a quick peck on the cheek, and even with *my* height, I had to stand on tiptoe.

He reddened a little, covered by running a hand through his hair again while he slid out a barstool.

As we sat down, the two silk-suited wannabes who'd been eyeballing me from the other end of the bar developed a sudden interest in the ballgame on TV.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The bartender came over and Lenihan pointed to my Sam and said, "Another one for Slim here, and the same thing for me."

"And a couple of menus," I said.

Lenihan looked up at the TV. "How they doin'?"

"Four zip Yankees, and it's only the second inning."

The bartender, menus tucked under his arm, brought two bottles of Sam and a tall frosted pint glass for Lenihan.

"So, I said, "what'd RMV come up with when they ran the partial plate?"

Lenihan filled his glass. "Well, there's good news and bad news."

"That always means it's mostly bad news," I said as Lenihan held up his glass and I clinked it with mine, "but here's to whatever good news you've got."

"Well, the good news is, we know your electric blue Neon is registered to an outfit called Inter City Rental out of New York. They have rental fleets at most of the major East Coast airports. I got hold of one of their managers here in Boston, and he told me the '2' on the plate means it's a two-door compact. The 'RT' stands for rental, it's on all their plates, and the '4' means it's a Dodge Neon. But without the last two digits, it could be any one of the twenty-seven Neons in their Boston fleet."

"That was the good news?" I said. "Not sure I want to hear the bad news."

He held up his hand. "Hold on a minute, I'm still on the good news. Out of the twenty-seven Neons, thirteen are that color blue. And out of those, only seven are currently rented."

"Seven," I said, "not bad. I was expecting something the size of the list of registered Democrats in Cambridge."

Lenihan took a healthy hit on his beer and cleared his throat. "Now the bad news."

"No list?" I said.

"No list. They said no way were they going to violate the privacy of seven of their customers without a court order."

The bartender came down and asked if we were ready to order.

"What did you call that pizza?" Lenihan asked me, "with, what was it, caramelized onion and parmesan something-or-other?"

"Pizza bianco," I said. "Caramelized onion, prosciutto, and parmesan cream."

The bartender gave us an apologetic frown. "Sorry folks, we stop serving pizza at four."

Lenihan twisted around on his stool to face me, which exposed the worn butt of the ancient .38 revolver he carries cross-draw on his left hip and the gold shield pinned to his belt. "No pizza," he said, shaking his head. "Do you know what the penalty is for purposefully giving a police officer false information?"

I held both hands out to Lenihan, wrists touching. "I guess you'll just have to arrest me."

The bartender was looking down at the gun and the badge on Lenihan's belt. "Maybe you're in luck, though," he said. "I think the guy that does the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pizza is still here." He gave Lenihan a wink. "If he hasn't shut down the oven yet, I think we can make an exception, Chief."

Lenihan told him it would be great if he could, and to make it two pizza biancos.

When the bartender left I said, "Okay, so what are the odds on getting a court order for Inter City's paperwork on the seven electric blue Neons?"

"Pretty good. The probable cause threshold for stalking is a lot lower now than it used to be. We may not have to go that route, though. I got a buddy who's a state cop, a sergeant over at the Logan International substation. I gave him a call. He says the Staties are forever bending the RESTRICTED AREA–NO PARKING rules at the airport for the rental companies. Says he'll go have a talk with this guy, see what he can come up with. In the meantime, fill me in on the details, the whole thing, right from the top."

I laid it all out for Lenihan, starting with the first phone call yesterday morning, and was describing the bag lady's narrow escape when the bartender slid two steaming pizza biancos across the bar. And the sweet smell of caramelized onion reminded me I'd eaten nothing since my corn muffin and coffee that morning.

Three quick slices later, Lenihan came up for air, dabbed at his mouth with a napkin, signaled the barkeep for another pair of Sams, and said, "So you got no idea who it is doin' this?"

"Not a clue. Earlier today, when I remembered I'd served Ezekiel Jones the first time at his father's funeral, I thought maybe all that 'haven't seen you since the funeral' stuff and the Neon following me around was Zeke trying to scare me off. Then I catch up with him this afternoon at Bottoms Up, tuck a subpoena down the front of his trousers, walk out the door, and there's the electric blue Neon pulling out of the parking lot. So no way was it Zeke."

Lenihan stopped with the glass halfway to his mouth. "Yeah, but who says it had to be Zeke? Coulda been someone he's got helping him. Seems like a lot of hassle, though, doesn't it? Just to keep from testifying."

"Maybe," I said, "maybe not. The lawyer who hired me to find Zeke says it was a drive-by, some gang thing that he witnessed. Says Zeke's testimony will clear his client. If that is true, Zeke knows the shooter and his bunch, if they could find him, would give him a Dorchester facial just to keep him from testifying, and would whack him, his sister, his mother, *and* his dog if he did. But after getting a glimpse of the Neon leaving the lot at Bottoms Up when I knew Zeke was still inside in the men's room, I'm beginning to wonder if he had anything at all to do with the phone calls."

"Yeah," Lenihan said around a mouthful of pizza, "and all that 'spawn of evil must be punished' crap sounds more like a twenty-four carat crazy than some Dorchester homie."

"Sure does," I said. "And now I think about it, the implied threat in 'when

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it's time, I'll find you' doesn't really feel like Zeke, either. Or, for that matter, fit a witness-in-hiding scenario."

"Wait a minute—" Lenihan spun around on his stool to face me. "—how about your father's?"

"My father's what?"

"Funeral. Maybe your phone-freak's somebody hasn't seen you since your *father's* funeral."

"God, Dad's funeral was two years ago, I don't remember much of anything about it. It was such a blur. Bagpipes and the overwhelming smell of flowers, cops in dress blues everywhere, and relatives I don't remember ever meeting mumbling words of sympathy I couldn't seem to hear. I don't know, I don't think I could tell you who was there or who wasn't."

Lenihan looked down at his hands and nodded. "Yeah, know how that goes."

I wondered what he meant by that, but I didn't ask.

He tipped his glass high and drained it. "What about that pusher your father bagged a couple of years back? What was his name, the one someone stuck a shiv into over at County?"

"Cass," I said, "his name was Sebastian Cass."

"Yeah," he said, "Cass, that's the guy. The stink the press raised over that one, you'da thought some head of state got offed. But I don't suppose you went to that funeral."

"No, I didn't. But I do remember driving through the mob scene at the church."

"You were there?"

"I was dropping off Dad. He went to the church service. Cass getting murdered in lockup really tore Dad up badly. That and the media circus it started was why he retired."

It was getting late. We had polished off both pizzas and downed the last of our beer. On the forty-two-inch plasma, two post-game commentators were analyzing Boston's four-nothing loss to New York. The bartender came down and waggled a finger at our empty glasses. "Two more?"

Lenihan glanced at his watch. "I'm good, how about you, Slim?"

"No, I'm all set. Didn't mean to keep you out so late. Hope I haven't gotten you in trouble."

Lenihan was reaching for his wallet. He stopped and looked at me and arched an eyebrow. "In trouble with who?"

His left hand was resting on the bar. I laid my right hand on top of it and tapped his wedding ring with my middle finger.

"Oh." He looked down at the ring. "No, she's been, ah—" He busied himself with his wallet. "—gone for three years, now."

Knowing how common it was among cops, I said, "Divorce?"

He shook his head. "Breast cancer."

"Aw shit," I said, "sorry. Someday I'll learn to keep my mouth shut."

"It's okay, no sweat. Like I said, it's been three years."

I pointed at his wallet. "Put that away. I told you, this one's on me."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The bartender, who had discreetly turned his attention to the TV screen when I did the bit with Lenihan's ring, turned back to Lenihan and held up his hand. "Uh-uh, Chief," he said. "Compliments of the house."

I slipped a folded twenty from my bag and gave the bartender a sugar handshake. "Thanks," I said. "Appreciate the after-hours pizza."

We headed for the door and Lenihan asked, "Did you drive or walk?"

"Drove."

"Where d'ya park?"

"Over on North Street."

"I'll walk you to your car."

A heavy mist haloed the streetlights, and the air was pregnant with the smell of the harbor and the promise of rain. Side by side. Not quite touching. Our footsteps muffled in the heavy mist. I was acutely aware of his nearness.

When we got to my car he said, "I'm gonna give you my cell number."

I must have looked surprised.

"You see the Neon or hear from this guy again, I want you to call me."

I beeped the lock, opened the driver's side door, and, in the glow of the overhead light, thumbed the number he gave me into my phone. He held the door open as I slid in under the wheel.

He leaned down, one hand still holding the top of the door, and put his other hand on my shoulder and gently shook it. "I mean it, Slim," he said looking down into my eyes, "you hear from this wacko again or see him call my cell right away. Okay?"

My pulse quickened when he touched my shoulder, and my breath felt hot in my throat. I managed a hoarsely whispered, "Okay."

He stepped back and closed the door.

I pulled away from the curb and headed home.

Jackson Ave shows up on most street maps of Boston, but it's not really a street. It's a wide brick walkway that rambles up from Commercial Street down on the waterfront to Charter Street up on Copp's Hill. It's fronted on one side by a row of three-story, ancient brick houses and bordered on the other by the low walls of a hillside park called Copp's Hill Terraces. My loft occupies the third floor, front to back, of one of the narrow old houses halfway up Jackson.

Parking spaces are scarce down on Commercial and nonexistent up on Charter, so, for not a lot less than the monthly mortgage payment on a small house in the suburbs, I lease a parking space in a lot just west of Jackson Ave. on Commercial.

The heavy mist had turned to rain. I was drifting along in the late evening traffic on Commercial Street, windshield wipers ticking away, recalling the look in Lenihan's eyes and the way his hand felt on my shoulder, smiling at the warm glow I got thinking about it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But somewhere, way back there in my erotically blurred brain cells, something was screaming at me. Jumping up and down to be remembered. Something the weirdo had said on the phone. Something about the ballgame on TV. I knew it was back there. But between all the beer and pizza and my libido working overtime, I was having trouble doing any heavy thinking.

I drove past the lower end of the stairway up to Copp's Hill Terraces, signaled for the left turn into my parking lot, glanced up at the rearview mirror, and spotted the Neon as it passed under a streetlight two cars behind me. The sudden jolt of seeing him behind me threw a bucketful of water on my fuzzyheaded musings.

And I remembered.

The ballgame. The score. Four-nothing. *Four, Val, you scatterbrain, four.*

He had told me, when I'd asked him what he wanted me to call him, "I'm hurt you don't remember, Val, it's only been four years."

I zipped into the lot, skidded into a U-turn around the attendant's shack, swiped my pass-card through the slot at the exit gate, banged a right back out on Commercial, and passed the Neon coming the other way. In the mirror I saw the Neon's brake lights flash red and its rear end slither sideways on the rain-slicked roadway.

I pulled over and double-parked at the foot of the long stairway up to Copp's Hill Terraces. I grabbed my handbag, hopped out of the car, and made a dash for the stairs. Halfway up I looked over my shoulder and saw the Neon skid to a stop behind my car. Someone leaped out of the Neon and headed for the stairway. I pulled out my phone, hit my new entry for Lenihan, and took the rest of the stairs two at a time.

I ran out into the park just far enough so whoever was coming up the stairs below could no longer see me, squatted down and duck-walked back into the shadow of the low wall at the head of the stairs, and was unzipping the side compartment of my handbag when Lenihan finally answered his phone.

"I'm up on Copp's Hill Terraces," I whispered into the phone, "and the wacko in the Neon is coming up the stairs after me. Get some cops over here, like *now*."

Lenihan was yelling something I couldn't hear as I closed the phone, dropped it into my pocket, and slid the compact Beretta out of the side compartment of my bag.

Above the hiss of the rain, I could now hear the heavy clomp of footsteps coming up the stairs. A dark figure barged through the opening in the wall, slid to a stop on the wet paving, and stood there staring into the empty corners of the park.

With the gun held down by the side of my leg, I stepped up behind him and said, "Looking for me?"

He jumped and spun around to face me.

It had only been four years since a grieving sixteen-year-old boy had watched me as I dropped *my* father off at *his* father's funeral. But wild eyed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and seething, rain matting his hair and running down his face, Angelo Cass now looked a hundred years older. He had a knife in his hand.

"I told you you'd regret mocking me." He waved the knife in my face. "You are the spawn of evil, and evil must be—"

I slammed my left forearm up into his wrist, pushing the knife out of my face, and rammed the gun up under his nose.

"In case you don't recognize it," I said, "what you're smelling is gun oil."

His eyes crossed and watered as he tried to look down at the gun pressed up under his nose.

"Nine millimeter," I said, "Ten rounds—" I thumbed off the safety. "—and just a twitch of my finger and it's gonna go bang."

His eyes bulged and he strained his head back away from the gun.

I leaned into him and kept the muzzle jammed up into his nose. "So unless you want that dysfunctional brain of yours scattered all over the park, I would suggest you drop the knife."

He stretched both arms out to the side, still looking down cross-eyed at the gun under his nose, and opened his hand. The knife slipped from his fingers and fell to the ground.

I had Angelo on his face—legs spread-eagled, fingers laced at the back of his neck—when all hell broke loose.

Up above on Charter Street, a BPD cruiser, light bar pulsing blue and white, gave the siren a couple of whelps and screeched to a stop. And Lenihan's unmarked, detachable bubble flashing red on the roof, screamed into a U-turn down on Commercial. Two uniforms, guns drawn, came charging down the steps from Charter as Lenihan bolted up the steps from below. And within fifteen minutes, there were cruisers clogging both streets and enough cops in the park for a St. Paddy's Day parade.

Working the scene under battery-powered halogens, a pair of CSU techs had bagged the knife, while two detectives from the A-1 hooked up Cass, read him his rights, and hauled him off. They had wanted me to come back to the station, but Lenihan convinced them they'd be busy enough getting Cass booked and bedded for the night. Said he'd bring me by first thing in the morning to make a full statement.

One after another, the cops and the crime scene techs climbed into their cruisers and vans and pulled out, leaving the streets clear and the park empty. Lenihan and I were sitting over on the Jackson Ave side of the wall across the walkway from the door to my building. It had stopped raining.

"So," I said, "your buddy the statie over at Logan came up with the list?"

"Yup. Said the night guy on the desk at Inter City Rental gave it to him off the computer."

"Just like that, no problem?"

"Nope. No problem. Just a matter of knowing who to ask, how to ask, and when."

"Sure," I said, "also helps to be wearing a state police uniform and a badge that says SERGEANT when you're doing the asking."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Can't hurt," he said. "Anyhow, said he'd fax over the seven names, addresses, and plate numbers, but I had him read me the seven names over the phone. And one of them was Angelo Cass. The 'Angelo' part didn't sound right to me—I didn't know about the son then. But Cass? Too much of a coincidence. So I called in and had one of our guys run it through the mill."

"And?"

"And it seems young Angelo started racking up a record shortly after his father got whacked. Punched out one of his teachers—no formal charges, but that got him expelled. Then a couple of disorderlies—no finding—a disturbing the peace—a year's probation on that one—then he gets into it with a cop in Downtown Crossing, takes a swing at him, gets arrested, calls the judge an f'ing pig at his prelim, and tries to go over the rail after him—in handcuffs, yet. That earned him a broken nose and a three-to-five at M.C.I. Cedar Junction. And guess what? They turned him loose just last week."

"Aha," I said, "so that's why he said something about the lawyer working me too hard the first time he called me, said I should have stayed on the police force."

"Yup. He was inside when you got your license and set up shop. He thought you were still working for that lawyer over on State Street. Anyhow, all that's what I was trying to tell you when you called for the troops then hung up the phone."

"Sorry about that, but I was kind of busy."

"Yeah, I'd say. But you already had it worked out it was him, huh?"

"A little late, but yes, I finally got it. My dad's funeral was two years ago, and Zeke's father's was the week before last. So the only funeral he could have seen me at *four* years ago was his father's. And if I hadn't been working so hard trying to prove to him how tough I was, I'd have gotten it as soon as he said it."

"Don't beat yourself up, Slim, that was a lot of spooky stuff, all that spawn of evil must be punished crap."

"And that's another thing I should have picked up on right away. I should have known he was referring to my father when he said I was the spawn of evil, and Angelo has to be the only person I can think of who ever would have had a reason to think of Dad as being evil."

Lenihan stood up and paced back and forth in front of me. "I guess I can see him thinkin' the only reason his father winds up getting killed in jail is because your father arrested him, and I can understand him redirecting his grief over the loss of his father into hate for your father. But what I don't get is how he gets from there to goin' after you."

I shrugged. "Not sure. Probably some sort of perversion of what the shrinks call transference."

"Translation, please, for those of us dummies who majored in Criminal Justice."

"Hey, easy on the 'dummies' stuff, I'm doing CJ nights at UMass myself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What I meant was, he knew I'd been a cop, too, so when the object of his hate died, he just transferred his hate from my father to me."

"Hmm—" He cocked his head to one side and shrugged. "—makes sense, I guess."

"What do you think will happen to Cass?" I said. "He never really got around to hurting anybody."

"Hard to say, but he'll get a preliminary hearing sometime in the next twenty-four hours, at which time, if I had to guess, the judge will send him down to Bridgewater for a series of psych evals. Whether he stands trial for stalking and assault with a deadly weapon or just gets institutionalized for a couple years will probably depend on whether or not the dome-doctors find him *non compos mentis*."

"So, what's your guess? Think he'll wind up doing the hard time?"

He shook his head. "Who knows. Even if they find him mentally competent to stand trial, between overcrowded prisons, overburdened courts, and some of the over-the-top judges in this state, it's anybody's guess. But either way, it's better than even money he'll be back out on the street in a couple a years."

"Now there's something to look forward to," I said.

A crescent-shaped slice of new moon had climbed out of the clouds and rode high above the harbor like a lopsided smile.

Lenihan looked down at his feet, glanced up at me, then turned and stared out at the harbor. He stuck his hands in his pockets, took a deep breath, and held it.

"Okay, Lenihan," I said, "what's the problem?"

He looked back at me and blew the breath he'd been holding out the side of his mouth. "No problem," he said. "It's just that it's been so goddamned long that I, ah . . . I don't know, I guess I don't remember how to, ah . . ."

"Don't remember how to *what*?" I said.

He shrugged it off and tried a smile. "Never mind, forget it. So what's a guy gotta do to get a beer around here this time a night, anyhow?"

"Come on," I said. I hooked my arm in his and walked him toward my door. I looked up at him and grinned. "As this old cop I know once told me," I said, handing him my key, "'Just a matter of knowing who to ask, how to ask, and when.'"

HOW TO SOLVE AN ACROSTIC

Using the definitions, fill in as many words as you can in the column on the right. Then transfer the letters from the column to their corresponding places in the diagram. A black square in the diagram indicates the end of a word. When completed, the diagram will yield a mystery-themed quotation. The initial letters of the words in the righthand column spell out the name of the author and the work from which the quote was taken.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dying Words

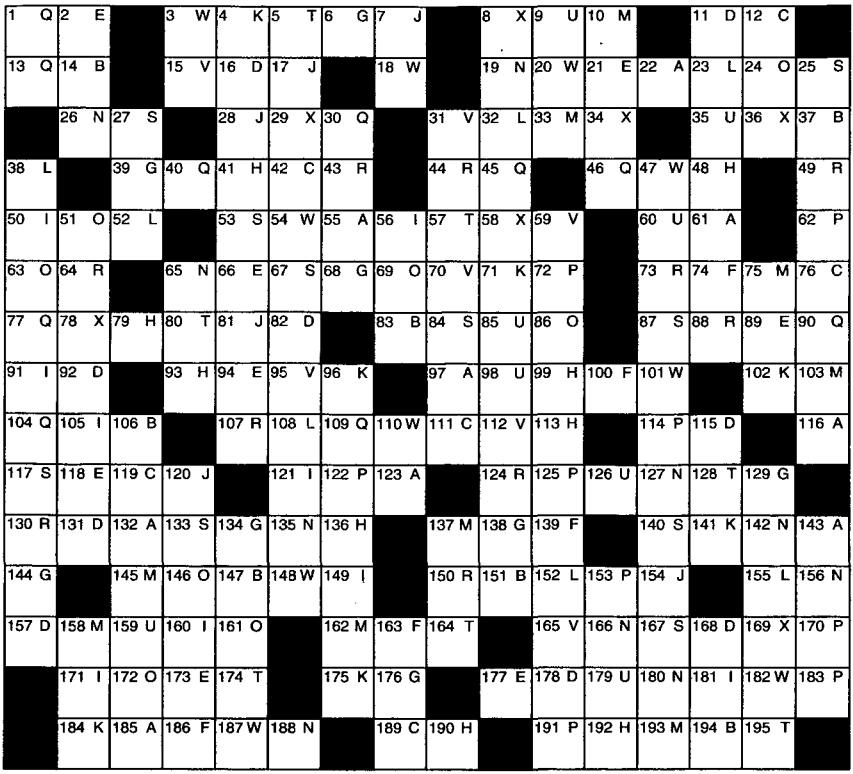
Acrostic by Arlene Fisher



For instructions on how to solve the acrostic puzzle, turn to page 41.
The solution to the puzzle will appear in the January/February issue.

DEFINITIONS	WORDS
A. British society member: 2 wds.	185 123 97 61 22 55 143 132 116
B. 1966 craze	151 83 147 106 14 194 37
C. Molasses confection	111 189 42 119 76 12
D. "As plain as the nose on your face"	131 11 157 168 115 178 82 16 92
E. Political convention statement	177 118 89 2 173 94 21 66
F. More than outré	74 100 186 163 139
G. Canada, Peru, etc.: 2 wds.	138 129 39 134 176 68 6 144
H. Dry red wine	99 79 136 93 192 190 113 48 41
I. Doppelgänger, perhaps: hyph. wd.	91 56 50 105 121 171 181 149 160
J. Cain, vis-à-vis Abel and Seth	120 17 7 81 28 154
K. Simple craft	96 4 184 102 141 71 175
L. Having a jagged edge	52 152 38 23 32 108 155
M. Politico's bane: 2 wds.	162 137 75 193 103 145 33 10 158
N. One hardly on the fence	156 166 26 127 142 19 135 65 188 180
O. Puerile	24 86 69 63 161 172 51 146
P. Far from inviting	125 170 191 153 183 72 62 122 114

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Q. Gulf of Guinea country: 2 wds.

1 109 40 90 30 77 104 13 45 46

R. Ancient-modern interval: 2 wds.

49 44 73 107 64 88 124 130 43 150

S. 1860s Hamlet portrayer: 2 wds.

67 133 140 84 87 53 117 27 167 25

T. Outwit obsolescence

164 5 195 80 128 57 174

U. Feel warmth for: 2 wds.

126 9 85 179 98 35 159 60

V. School

165 59 95 70 15 31 112

W. 1995 Christina Ricci movie: 3 wds.

148 110 3 18 101 187 20 47 54 182

X. Implore

58 8 78 169 36 29 34

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

COMES AROUND

CHRIS ROGERS

He had the face of a murderer. Nothing else could account for my instant certainty, and I was dead certain. Jake McGrew had killed a fellow being in cold blood.

After twenty years on the job—eight with Homicide before I took retirement—I can get the scent of trouble up my nose like a bloodhound. Finding out who McGrew had killed shouldn't be impossible. I took it as my personal challenge.

He comes around on our poker nights, supposedly doing a story called "Games People Play." Claims he's an essayist, whatever that means, and we let him watch. Came around last night, drew up a chair right beside me, watching how I played my hand.

Around our table, I can sum up each player in a word. Ed Colliard—he's a joker. Can't go five minutes without cracking a line. Guess every table has one. Betty Grable—yeah, that's her real name, and yeah, we don't mind that she's female—Betty's a thinker. Doesn't talk much, but ask her a question about anything, doesn't matter—railroads, baked hams, French poodles—she can tell you more than you want to know and pose philosophical suppositions that will numb your mind.

Then there's Boots Reyes. He's young, loudmouthed, foulmouthed, smartmouthed—in a word, callow. That boy has lots to learn. Kevin Locke, he's reverent. I don't mean he's a man of the cloth, although it wouldn't surprise me to learn he'd been a preacher sometime in his past. What I mean is Kevin has an "oh, wow" attitude about life. He can be awestruck by a blade of Johnson grass.

And now there's Jake McGrew, killer.

"Boots!" Ed interrupted the kid, who was rambling on and on about a new video game, "would you deal sometime this century? I swear, boy, you could talk your head off and never miss it."

Boots dealt the cards. "I'm not taking your crap tonight, Ed. So leave off, already." He cursed a blue streak under his breath.

"How long have you guys been playing poker together?" McGrew asked, smiling as he looked around the table at all of us.

Nobody jumped in to answer him. Finally, Kevin spoke up.

"I had to think a minute there, and now I'm wondering if it can be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

right. Has it really been nine years, Bradshaw?"

That's me, by the way, Ford Bradshaw.

"Going on ten," I said, "for you, me, and Ed."

"Yeahhhh." Kevin nodded. "You were still on the force, I had my vet practice, Ed owned the supermarket on Tenth Street—"

"I still own the store," Ed said. "I just have a menagerie now."

"Menagerie?" McGrew asked. Only a newcomer would ask.

"General manager, produce manager, meat manager—menagerie."

Like I said, Ed can't let a straight line just lie there. McGrew laughed politely. Most people do until they've been around Ed for a while. I'd give McGrew an hour.

"So you three are all retired," he said, taking a small stack of note cards and a pen from his shirt pocket. He scribbled a few words on the top card and slipped it back into his shirt. "What about you, Boots?"

"Do I look like I'm retired?"

"I mean, how long have you been playing with the group?"

"A couple months is all. Somebody moved out of state—"

"Paulie Cade," Betty said. "Moved to Florida, just as four out of every five retirees do who move out of state when they quit working. What draws them, I wonder? The hurricanes? The drugs? Swamps and alligators? The Disney World tourists? Why not retire to Georgia or Mississippi, where the living is easy?"

She dropped two cards face down on the table and wiggled a finger for Boots to give her two more.

"When did you join the group, Ms. Grable?"

"Just Betty." Picking up her soda glass, she raised it toward McGrew. "I'm celebrating my paper anniversary with our poker club this very night."

Maybe McGrew knew what "paper anniversary" meant. I didn't, and nobody asked.

I drew three cards to a pair of sevens—no help—as I watched McGrew's hands. How a person uses his hands can reveal plenty, if you think about it. Look at a diagram of the brain sometime, one that shows the parts of the body each area controls. You'll see about the same amount of brain matter allotted for hand movement as for vocalization. In other words, your hands can say as much as your mouth. The first thing I noticed about McGrew, he's left handed. Sinister, to use the old terminology. The Boston Strangler was a lefty. So was Jack the Ripper. The American Zuni Indians consider the left hand the hand of judgment.

Ed slid a five-dollar chip into the pot, raising it. Boots and Kevin folded.

"Most people these days who retire before they turn sixty," McGrew said, "keep busy through consulting or ownership, like Mr. Collins, or go into another line of work."

Kevin's eyes grew round like Orphan Annie's in the comic strip.

"Hey, that's right! All three of us. I sold the practice, but the young fellow pays me a consulting fee just to keep my name on the door and drop by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

once a week. And Bradshaw, you're still a cop, right? Just not on the force."

McGrew looked at me. "Security guard? Private detective?"

"I find skips and runaways." My hands remained still as I said it. Most liars, their hands give it away. Like Henry Kissinger, tapping his nose, thumbing his chin. Anybody could see he was pushing the truth around the way his hands were pushing at his face.

"Is that profitable?" McGrew scribbled on another card and slid it into his pocket.

"It's satisfying." This time the truth came easy. On the job, the satisfaction of jailing a perpetrator ended when I saw them right back on the street, thanks to an overburdened legal system. Privately, I don't have to involve jails, lawyers, or judges.

I looked at McGrew's hands and wondered what weapon he used. He raised his pen and pointed it at Ed the way some men would point a knife for an upward thrust, all four fingers wrapped around the shaft, thumb on top for leverage.

A jolt of excitement whipped through me like an electrical shock. It's always like that when I close in on a case, but with McGrew I had only a hunch.

"You must know one another pretty well after ten years," he said.

Ed shrugged. "I know Kevin can't resist drawing to an inside straight and Bradshaw will bluff with a pair of deuces." He laid down three sixes and raked in the chips. "That doesn't tell me if they sleep with their socks on or what they do alone in the shower."

McGrew smiled. He had a hustler's smile, the kind of smile that convinces an old woman to part with her life's savings, or a young one her virginity. Ted Bundy had a smile like that. So did Tom Parker, before I shot him through the right eye.

Parker, from a family with both money and power, had started his life of crime with several occasions of date rape and never served a day in jail. That gave him the brass to push the envelope. He kidnapped a young woman, kept her three days for fun and games, then dumped her in the Gulf of Mexico, which wiped away all evidence. The cops knew, the court knew, I knew, and only one of us had the mettle to give Parker what he deserved.

After the game tonight I drove home thinking about McGrew. He looked familiar. Could mean he already had a sheet. But he didn't strike me as street tough, and judging by his speech, he'd spent at least a couple years in college. Maybe the Feds had tagged him. Before morning I intended to know everything about McGrew down to the color of his underwear, and somewhere along the way I'd figure out who he'd killed.

The same year I retired from the job my wife Connie died on a dark highway, in a sudden thunderstorm. Wind had knocked a dead tree across the road. Connie must've spotted the tree in her headlights about the same time she saw an eighteen-wheeler coming the other way. Nothing makes a cop feel more helpless than acts of God.

It had been Connie's idea to move out to the country, me grumbling

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all the way, but now I'm glad for it. Cuts down on visitors, and I like the privacy of having my nearest neighbors a mile away, where they never complain, no matter how loud I play old-time rock and roll. I have the original vinyl, but I've also converted them all to CDs. The country has its drawbacks, though, like frequent power outages and deer and rabbits ravaging the yard. Until last year I had to use a dial-up modem. Now I can get files faster at my home office than if I were still on the job. Can't say it's all strictly legal, but that's another advantage of being private.

At home, I sat in the semidarkness, a single lamp shining in the corner, and watched my computer sort through information while my mind did its own sorting. Since Connie's death I'd burned more garbage than in my entire career as a police officer, and the faces filed through my brain like a slide show. Murderers mostly, but also child molesters, rapists, and stupid, unintentional killers, who were sometimes the worst of the bunch. "Oh, Judge, I never meant to drink a fifth of Johnnie Walker and drive through that school zone." This disposal work is another reason for keeping a low profile. I can just imagine Kevin's gee-wow-gosh surprise if he found out what I do on the side.

It's interesting how the public tends to demonize, or at best ignore, the people who do their dirty work. When hanging a killer was a noontime town event, with sodas and confections sold among a titillated audience, the hangman often wore a black hood to protect his identity. Now our executions are conducted at midnight behind layers of prosecutorial protection, the condemned gently put to death while already anesthetized by drugs. As always, the warden gives the nod, a doctor stands by to pronounce the death, but it's a nonentity who actually releases potassium chloride into the condemned's vein. Think about it—executioners, undertakers, garbage collectors—we need them but we don't want to know them.

I once burned a piece of garbage who was barely fifteen years old, and I'll admit it took every ounce of intestinal fortitude I could summon to pull that trigger. This boy, Mason, liked to beat things to a bloody pulp with his baseball bat. First, it was birds and rodents, then the neighbors' pets. He'd bash them until there was nothing identifiable left and bury them in a field behind his parents' garage. When a child in the neighborhood went missing, homicide eventually found Mason's animal burial ground and evidence of the child having been there. Officers on the job believed that Mason's parents had discovered the body and dumped it elsewhere, but nothing was ever proved. The bat was never found, either, which meant Mason wasn't even slated for juvie lockup. So I staked him out. For three months I lurked around the neighborhood, and finally I caught him at his new killing ground, behind a clump of yaupon bushes, cat in one hand and his new method of torture in the other, a flathead screwdriver. A quick bullet to the back of Mason's head made certain he wouldn't hurt another child, but I didn't arrive in time to save the cat.

Despite high-speed access, my research on Jake McGrew turned up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

squat. Lots of hits on the name, including some recent articles written by the "essayist" who came around to our poker games. Otherwise, nothing. No birth certificate, social, or driver's license that fit. Before six months ago—

"I don't exist."

The voice behind me froze my hand on the mouse and my thoughts on the holstered .9 mm hanging on the back of my chair.

Then he moved and I caught his reflection in the window clear enough to see the revolver pointed at my head.

"Fancy yourself some kind of equalizer, is that it, Bradshaw? Making up for the inadequacies of the failing justice system?"

"I knew you were wrong, McGrew. You reek of it."

"Uh-huh. Only I think it's your own life you're smelling. Stand up."

As close as he was, even a lame shooter could spatter my brains all over my laptop. I stood up slowly.

"Step away from your chair."

I did, and two seconds later he had my nine in his other hand.

"You must be hiding something pretty big," I said, "to be worried about having me on your back."

Flashing that same cheesy smile I'd seen at the poker game, he said, "I'm not the one with reason to be worried here." He dropped the nine into his pocket. "Have you figured it out yet? Who I am?"

I didn't answer, but the question had been eating at me the whole time he was talking, and I knew it showed in the curl of my hands.

"Face down on the floor."

By his tone, he might have been telling me to have a nice day. The Taurus .44 mag put an uglier spin on it. Still, I hesitated.

"You're going to die tonight, Bradshaw. The only choice you have is whether we start at your ankles and work our way up or make it an easy headshot."

I got down, first on my knees then to the floor, but I wanted to distract him from my left hand—my dominant hand, fortunately—and the floor lamp just beyond it.

"So who did you kill, sport?" I said, aiming my right index finger and cocking it like a pistol. "A girlfriend? A partner? Another essayist?"

"Sandra Louise Westin."

When his heel came down on my fingers, I knew he'd noticed the lamp, but the name threw me. Sandra Westin? The pieces didn't fit.

"Westin was a hit-and-run," I said, clenching my teeth against the pain. Then it clicked. "He was your father."

"Yes, he was." McGrew leaned his full weight into the shoe that was crushing my hand. I grunted and blinked sweat out of my eyes.

Sandra Westin had been killed by a fifty-two-year-old department store manager, Harold Belk, divorced twelve years. His son went to school at Texas A&M. Sandra Westin's Toyota sedan had been hit at a high-speed intersection. Afterward, it spun off the road and into a concrete post. A wit-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness who missed seeing the actual impact but saw a car leaving the scene provided a description of the vehicle as well as four digits of the six-digit license number. Belk was picked up an hour later at a company Christmas party. He claimed he'd been at the party all evening, that someone must have hiked his car from the parking garage. But several people said he'd left the party for a while right after dinner. Although the officers working the case knew Belk was lying, Belk's lawyer made a convincing plea and the jury acquitted.

"It was an accident," McGrew said.

Or rather, Jake Belk said.

The reason I hadn't placed his face before was because I'd never seen Harold's kid. He had his father's eyes, mouth, and chin, but Harold Belk was dead. Another piece of garbage disposed of.

"Your father lied. He went back to the party to establish an alibi—"

"He lied to protect me. I dropped him at his party that night and used the car to go to my own party. It was raining. This Toyota pushed through a red light and I couldn't stop in time. When I checked and saw she was dead, I panicked. I drove straight back to the parking garage and called my dad. He came out and I told him everything. He made me take a bus back to school, and even after his arrest, Dad wouldn't let me come forward. Said my age was against me, plus the fact that I'd left the scene. Said no one could prove he was driving the car, because he hadn't been, and anyway, it was an accident and ruining my whole life wouldn't bring Sandra Westin back.

"Dad was certain a jury would find him not guilty. And he was right. But then you come around. You convicted, sentenced, and executed a man who never hurt anyone in his life."

Belk was squatting beside me now, down on one knee. The mag, steady in his hand, its muzzle at my right temple, would leave nothing but a bloody stump above my neck.

"Maybe you were a good cop once. Maybe you even eliminated a few monsters from the world when you first started playing Divine Reaper." He bumped the cold muzzle against my skin. "Look at me."

I looked up into the face of a murderer and knew that I was his first kill.

"What goes around . . ." he said, and pulled the trigger.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE PROPER APPLICATION OF PRESSURE TO A WOUND

SHERRY DECKER

I was tempted to squat right there in front of God and everybody and piss on Jesse Frenault's grave—except I doubt God cares about things like that, and what the hell, all the other mourners were already gone. Unbuttoning my wool coat, lifting my long, black skirt, and peeling down my pantyhose would have been a struggle wasted on the squirrels.

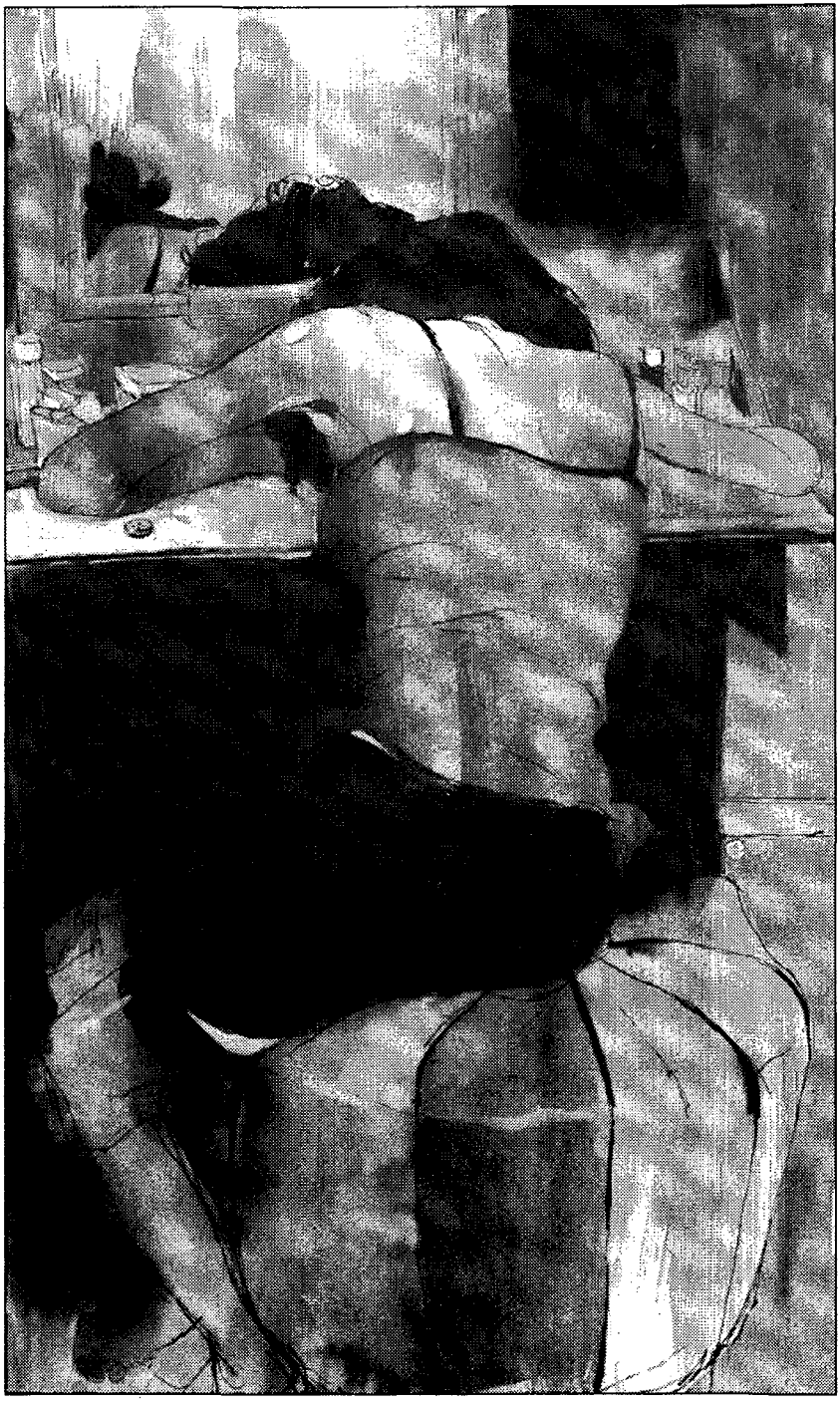
The branches of a giant maple sheltered the new grave. The November winds had stripped most of the leaves already, but a steady trickle of amber leaves whirled and rustled down around me. It wouldn't be long before the grave was covered and the only thing to suggest the thoughtless old buzzard was buried there was his modest gravestone. I leaned forward, planning to spit on the arched marble, but couldn't work up enough saliva to even swallow, much less spit.

"You poor old fart," I said. Another leaf brushed my shoulder and spiraled down to decorate more of the fresh, russet dirt.

After taking care of him for three straight years most days and nights, he didn't leave me a red cent. He left it all to his lazy ass son who had come home to visit him *once* during his last year on earth. His son's name was Vincent Reginald Frenault, and he spent more time following me around, *accidentally* stroking my rear, than spending time with his dying father. I felt like saying, "Here, dammit, Vincent, you hold your old man's sticky pecker while he takes a leak since you're so keen to help out." Vincent would have fired me on the spot, though, and I needed the job. After being put on probation from the hospital for mouthing off to a doctor I was lucky to have a nursing job at all. I've made some sad decisions in my life.

I had been in a sound sleep when Jesse's bell started clanging. I went tearing next door, zipping up the front of my robe as I ran, hopping from one foot to the other and pulling my slippers on over my heels. I found

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Edward Kinsella III

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jesse upright in bed, the first time he had sat up by himself in six months. It must have been sheer terror that gave him enough strength in those stick-thin arms and in his gnarled, age-spotted hands twisted by arthritis. He grabbed my arm as soon as I reached the side of his bed. His blind eyes were like mottled green grapes ready to burst from too much juice. I thought he was having a seizure by the way he jerked from side to side. Beneath his thin blue gown, open down the front, his rib cage heaved like a bellows.

I felt his bald head and clammy brow. "No fever. You in pain?"

"I can't . . ." he said. Almost a quart of blood shot from his toothless mouth like water from a fire hose, all over my arm and hand and the bedcovers. He toppled forward, his face landing in the gelatinous puddle on the bedspread. I lifted his head and saw thick yellow mucous bubble from both nostrils. Blood and mucous make me queasy—a bizarre flaw for a nurse. I often wonder, what's in those lumps and smears? I half expected to see something moving in that puddle.

I pulled him back on his pillows and dialed 911 even though I knew he was dead. Vincent slept through it all.

Jesse was more pathetic than hateful, so I'm glad I didn't squat on his grave. It's just that I was counting on him to leave me something in his will, considering all the care I gave him. He said I was the best nurse he'd ever had and that I was "quite outspoken." Or, did he say I was "awfully free with my opinion"? Anyway, he liked me to read to him at bedtime. I didn't mind. It felt good to look up every page or so and see him resting on his pile of pillows with his clean face and hair and his clean bedding. I bathed him every evening after dinner and slid him between fresh laundered sheets. It was the only time he didn't smell like a shitty diaper or like a moldy old refrigerator hauled off and left at the garbage dump. Old refrigerators have their own unique smell, as if forty years of curdled milk, rancid meat, moldy fruit, and cheese had permeated their walls. A person can scrub until she is exhausted and the refrigerator walls are raw from her scouring, but that stink hangs on. Jesse smelled like that, like an old, moldy refrigerator, propped up and abandoned at the garbage dump.

"You're welcome to stay on," Vincent told me the morning the coroner picked up his father's body.

"For what?"

"I might need some tender loving care once in a while." Vincent sounded quite serious, but the expression on his face made me want to jam my palm up against the end of his nose real hard, driving the nasal bone into his frontal lobes. A lobotomy, compliments of the private nurse.

Instead, I picked up my medical bag and my suitcase and headed for the door.

"Let me know if you change your mind," he called after me.

One year earlier I would have shouted something *appropriate* over my shoulder, but I've learned from my unhappy experience at the hospital that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

saying nothing *demonstrates restraint* and it leaves them wondering what you would have said if they were worth the spit and air it takes to say it.

Hospital Special Services added my name to their list again and promised to call as soon as they found something "fitting."

"If possible, no terminal cases this time please," I said.

The counselor nodded and then shook her head. Everybody wants the same thing, a patient who isn't dying. We all want someone who will get well or at least stabilize.

"I'll call as soon as we do a needs-comparison," she said. That meant she would scrape the bottom of the barrel before she found something for me.

Three of my patients died during my last month at the hospital. One of them was a middle-aged woman in the final stages of cancer, so her death wasn't unexpected. She just slipped away while I held her hand. One minute there was the light of life in her eyes, a look of awareness, resignation, peace, and a moment later she was gone. She didn't blink or look away. She faded out, like a flashlight with a weak battery.

There was an eight-year-old boy who had found his father's loaded target pistol and shot himself right through the ears. He looked fine, like we could wipe off the blood and plug the holes with cotton swabs where his inner ears had been and send him home. I squeezed his mother's hand as he took his last breath. Her knees gave way and I caught her before she hit the floor.

I've always heard that doctors and nurses make the worst patients. It's true. Dr. Everson was in his mid forties and as healthy looking as any athlete.

Rumor had it, one day he discovered a lump on his knee. He didn't wait for the test results. Instead, he entered and locked the door of an examination room and injected himself with a syringe full of air while I banged on the door and peered through a gap in the blinds. The emergency team broke the glass and unlocked the door, but they failed to revive him. He died alone in the stark room beneath a faulty overhead light flickering off and on. Not the kind of place I would choose to end it all.

My checkbook was screaming to be fed it when my final paycheck from the Frenault estate arrived, barely enough to pay my bills and buy groceries. I didn't buy much at the Thrift-Mart, though. After someone dies in my care I tend to lose my appetite for a while. But since I was there, I bought a pound of whole coffee beans, a quart of milk, and a bag of raisin bagels and stashed them in my empty refrigerator. I had taken so many meals at the Frenault estate my refrigerator had developed that abandoned smell, and it reminded me of Jesse, so I scrubbed it with baking soda and hot water while shuddering and holding back memories of blood and mucous.

It had been months since I had enjoyed a walk and I headed for town, hoping to elevate my mood. I couldn't afford to buy anything. I forgot my scarf and gloves so I shoved my numb hands into my coat pockets. It was just above freezing, cloudy and blustery. Hardly uplifting.

Leisure time affords the opportunity to see and hear things one doesn't want to remember later: an old married couple arguing over whom is too

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blind to drive, a young couple fighting about money, an impatient mother scolding her toddler. Someday she'll pray he's forgotten what she said.

"You're a brat. I should spank you right here where everyone can see! Stop crying! I don't want an ugly, bawling kid with me."

I'd never say things like that to my child. I was married once. Pregnant.

In the middle of town was a corner pharmacy. It had a window display of blood-pressure cuffs. I stood there, comparing price and features, reminded of Jesse Frenault. Behind me, brakes screeched, followed by an awful, double-thump. A man shouted. People raced by me into the intersection.

From inside the open door of the drugstore, someone shouted, "Call 911. Pedestrian hit by a car!" The pharmacist rounded the end of the counter and ran out the door and into the street.

I pushed my way into the crowd behind him. "Let me through. I'm a nurse."

The pharmacist was already there, kneeling beside a little girl on the cold, damp street. She looked to be about six years old and bled from a deep gash on her thigh. A jagged bone protruded through the torn flesh. A blue lump swelled on her brow.

"My baby," a man moaned. "Someone, help!"

Ten feet away the gleaming bumper of a silver Mercedes hummed. No dents, no blood, no sign of colliding with the child. I wondered how the car had managed to miss a big, hefty guy like the father and mow down a tiny girl.

I knelt alongside the pharmacist, "I'm a registered nurse," I said. He nodded, his face as gray as the pavement. I placed my hand over the girl's wound and pressed, staunching the flow of blood. A siren wailed from the fire station six blocks away.

"Shouldn't that doctor be helping that kid, instead of just some . . . pedestrian?" The voice came from behind us. "Aren't you a doctor?" A man tapped the pharmacist on the shoulder. The pharmacist shook his head, looking pale to the point of green.

With my free hand I stroked the child's light brown, wavy hair. Her blue eyes were half open. I smiled, hoping she would blink or return the smile, but she didn't.

"It's her birthday. I promised we'd go out for milkshakes. Vanilla is her favorite." Her father crumpled to his knees, gasping.

"What's her name?" I asked.

The father shook his head as if my question made no sense.

"Her name?"

"Angela."

Chills raced down my neck and arms. *Why*, I asked. But God has never answered that question, and I have asked it a million times in the past six years.

Angela was the name I had chosen for my baby. Had she been born she would be the same age as the child in the street, this child whose warm blood coated my hand.

Angela blinked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Help is on the way," I told her. "You'll be okay."

Like her, my husband had light brown, wavy hair and blue eyes, and like her he had a spray of freckles across his nose.

Derek.

This Angela wore a navy blue coat and black Mary Jane shoes with white ruffled anklets. The hem of a red-checked dress escaped where a missing button allowed the coat to fall open. The dress hem was small, about a half-inch wide and hand stitched. Maybe her mother had sewn the dress for her with barely enough material, or it was secondhand. I'd never know, but it made me angry. An innocent child from a poor family, her birthday party was a milkshake and her party dress was a hand-me-down. And now this, hit by a car, her blood on the street. Strangers staring. Her father crying. Life was cruel.

The crowd parted and the ambulance rolled to a stop. Two men scrambled out carrying a stretcher, a third carried an emergency aid kit.

"Got her," one of them said. I moved aside. My hand was sticky with a sheer red glove of blood.

They loaded Angela into the ambulance and sped away with lights flashing and the siren screaming. The crowd shuffled away, dragging me with it. The ambulance was swallowed by traffic while my old familiar numbness returned to my neck, back, and legs.

The pharmacy assistant patted me on my shoulder. "Good thing you were here." She nodded toward the front door of the drugstore. Inside, the pharmacist leaned against the counter, swallowing again and again as if trying to hold back vomit. "He hit a jaywalker with his car a couple years ago. Killed him." She patted me on the shoulder again. "You okay?"

"Yeah," I lied.

I hadn't been okay in six years, alternating between anger and numbness. Sometimes the anger startles me and makes it difficult to respond to anyone with a calm, tolerant voice. The numbness makes me appear uncaring.

I had often made conversation with co-workers, patients and neighbors, gave injections and baths, took blood pressures, administered prescription drugs, detected fevers and even diagnosed illnesses in time to save lives, but I had done it all with a detachment no nurse should have. I was either angry and shooting my mouth off, or numb and going through the motions, looking like I didn't care. No wonder the hospital put me on probation.

My attention was drawn to something in the gutter at my feet, a dark blue button. I squatted and picked it up. Angela's missing coat button gleamed in my palm like a beveled jewel. I squeezed it tight and suppressed a sob.

As I stumbled back toward my apartment I whispered the things I'd sacrifice for Angela's survival. A soft voice inside my head asked, even Derek?

He's already gone anyway.

Your profession?

I'm not such a great nurse.

Your own health?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Who cares?

Happiness?

What happiness?

The Bible says one cannot bargain with God, but that has never stopped me from trying.

When I reached the steps to my apartment building, I paused, looked up, and studied my darkened fourth floor windows. The thought of unlocking my door, opening my refrigerator, and smelling Jesse Frenault again made my throat hurt. I didn't want to think about Jesse or Angela or Derek. Numbness or the anger would be better; I was accustomed to both.

I kept walking.

An hour later I found myself at another intersection with another corner pharmacy, this one newer and larger. I studied their window display of bath mats, shower curtains, towels, washcloths, security railings, hot water bottles, thermometers, and bed trays.

Inside was a fifties-style lunch counter with six red vinyl-covered stools, one occupied by a man sipping coffee from a bisque-colored mug. Half a sandwich remained on a matching plate. The sight made me yearn for shelter from the cold wind, and to wrap my hands around a cup of hot coffee.

I claimed the stool at the opposite end of the counter near some swinging double doors. The waitress raised the coffee carafe and her eyebrows. I nodded and she brought another bisque-colored mug and a matching pitcher of half-and-half.

She halted, openmouthed, carafe in mid-tilt. "Oh, are you hurt?"

My bloody hand rested palm up on the counter. I flexed my stiff fingers.

"No, a pedestrian-car accident. I just applied pressure to the wound."

"A little girl?"

I nodded.

The waitress filled my mug. "They're looking for you," she said.

"Who is?"

"Not sure. The police. The hospital. It was on the radio but I didn't hear it all. Are you sure you're okay?" Pop music played in the background.

I exhaled as if I'd been holding my breath a long time. The waitress and the other customer were both staring at me. I nodded again.

"Here." The waitress wrung out a soapy wet towel and handed it to me. It was hot and it felt good on my cold hands. The white terrycloth turned reddish brown as my skin turned beige again.

The bell above the front door clanged and a gray-haired African American couple entered. They went straight to the prescription counter.

The pretty pharmacy assistant eyed their prescription and nodded. "It'll be about ten minutes," she said.

The old couple sat down on a green vinyl sofa beside the self-serve blood pressure machine.

A Pakistani woman entered dressed in an aqua blue sari with silvery trim that didn't look warm enough for the blustery weather. She laid a prescription on the counter and left again. Before the door closed behind her, two

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grade school–aged boys entered. They dropped their backpacks on the floor and knelt beside the magazine rack.

Another minute passed as I studied my reflection in the stainless steel backsplash behind the sinks. My reflection appeared elongated and blue gray, but my short brown hair looked neat, considering the wind outside.

Other than the accident, I couldn't remember any details from my walk. I didn't recall passing anyone, although I must have, and couldn't remember crossing any streets, but I had to have crossed numerous intersections.

A familiar sounding voice caught my attention. "Thanks for stocking these. This brand is hard to find." It was Dr. March, the pediatrician on staff at the hospital—the one responsible for my probation. His voice made me angry. His words replayed in my mind: "It's hard to believe you're an educated woman with that mouth of yours."

We made brief eye contact in the polished metal. I looked away but I knew he recognized me and that he was going to say something.

Screw you, I was ready to shout, but when I looked again the front door opened and closed and he was gone. At first I felt relieved, and then insulted. *Leave them wondering what you would have said.*

The bell above the door rang again. A man wearing jeans and a buff-colored jacket entered. His dark windblown hair covered his forehead and ears. He paused, studying his own feet, as if trying to recall what he had come in for.

The waitress refilled my mug. "Want a menu?"

I shook my head. "No, but maybe I should call the hospital," I said, and she nodded.

Bang. Her forehead disappeared. Strands of blond hair and pink matter dotted the stainless backsplash. A piece of scalp and hair fell with a *plop* into the murky dishwater and she collapsed like a marionette with severed strings. The coffee carafe popped like a big light bulb when it hit the floor.

"Huh?" The other customer at the counter slammed his mug down.

Bang.

He jerked as if he'd been kicked from behind. He slumped forward, tipping his mug over and spilling black coffee across the counter. I turned on my stool. The man in the buff-colored jacket pointed a gun at the elderly couple on the vinyl sofa, pulled the trigger twice, and the man and woman slumped together like Siamese twins joined at the cheekbone. Their mouths fell open. The man's false teeth dropped into his lap, followed by a glistening trail of spittle.

A man wearing a greasy apron shoved the swinging doors open, tripping over the waitress on the floor. He straightened, straddling her body.

"What the . . ." He wielded a meat cleaver in one hand, and then there was a loud *pop* and blood spurted from a hole in his throat. His eyes bulged as he dropped straight down beside the waitress. He gurgled for a few seconds and then fell silent.

The gunman aimed the gun at the pretty young pharmacy assistant. I stood up. My stool made a loud wobble-wobble sound as it spun in crooked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

circles. He jerked his head in my direction as the assistant ran past him and out the door. He turned all the way around, as if considering a shot at her through the window, but the pharmacist came through a doorway behind the prescription counter and *bang*, he took the bullet instead.

The gunman walked toward me but halted five feet away when the dead man with his face in his coffee spiraled off his stool and toppled to the floor. His head bounced once on the glossy linoleum, his ears full of blood.

The eerie calm was broken only by the sound of Bobby McFerrin singing "Don't Worry, Be Happy" over the radio. A strong diesel smell emanated from the gunman as he drew closer. He was in his mid thirties and hadn't shaved in at least a week. Above the stubble his gray eyes looked blank. He cradled the gun in black-stained hands, aiming it at my face.

"What has happened to you?" My voice sounded calm even to me.

He shook his head as if it were an impossible question. Then he raised the gun to his own temple and pulled the trigger, splattering brown hair, white skull, and pink brain confetti over the two boys crouched at the base of the magazine rack. They scrambled to their feet and ran out the door, leaving their backpacks behind. Sirens wailed in the distance.

I lowered myself to the stool on shaking knees.

Emergency Services and the local newspaper labeled me a hero.

"I simply applied pressure to the wound," I explained.

The police said I had saved three lives at the pharmacy. The survivors' names were listed below the victims in the newspaper article. The pharmacy assistant said I distracted the gunman so she and the two boys could escape. The boys were interviewed for the evening news with their parents sitting beside them. They didn't say much. Mostly, they just nodded or said, "uh-huh.'"

I refused to be interviewed, but people kept thanking me in the days that followed even though I tried to explain. "I simply stood up. My stool wobbled."

Heroes risk their lives to save people. They run into burning buildings, or confront terrorists. All I did was press on an artery and stand up from a lunch counter.

The hospital called. I have a full-time job again in the emergency room, graveyard shift. It's a foot in the door. A second chance.

A few days later the newspaper ran another article, with Angela's photo. I still have her coat button in my jewelry box. I forgot to take it with me when I visited her and brought her new crayons and a coloring book.

The town fathers awarded me a thousand dollars, along with a framed document signed by the mayors of the adjoining towns. It's on top of my refrigerator. I haven't hung it up. I might not. It reminds me of that day, like old refrigerators will always remind me of Jesse and like girls with light brown, wavy hair and freckles will always remind me of my dead baby and of Derek.

☠☠☠

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Last week I rounded a corner with a cart full of surgical tools hot from the autoclave and almost collided with Dr. March. I had never noticed before how much he looks like Derek. They could be brothers.

"Welcome back," he said.

I wanted to reply, but my throat muscles cramped and I couldn't say anything. Instead, I nodded and pulled the cart out of his way.

Maybe I yelled at him that day three years ago because he reminded me of Derek, and thinking about Derek makes my throat cramp. Thinking about Derek makes me remember Angela. I don't know, maybe that's not so terrible.

Derek didn't want children. He suggested the abortion, but ultimately it was my decision. Three months later he left me anyway.

I've started keeping a journal. I wrote, How many people witness an accident, save a life, and then wander into a pharmacy where someone with a gun starts shooting people? What are a person's chances of experiencing a day like that?

Writing things down helps me cope. I'm sleeping and eating better. I'm hardly ever angry and haven't felt numb in a long time.

I also wrote, It was a bad decision, but I believe my Angela has forgiven me.

Something surprising happened, another strange coincidence, really. Vincent Reginald Frenault checked into the hospital for a CAT scan. Turns out he had a large benign tumor on one kidney. I'm a surgical coward myself, and I wondered if Vincent was terrified or in pain. I wasn't certain what he'd say if I visited him, but the day after his surgery I went up to the third floor, just for poor old Jesse's sake.

Vincent lay on one side, hugging a pillow in a private room with a view of the foothills and mountains. An ostentatious bouquet of red roses in a Waterford crystal vase monopolized the corner table. I'm certain Vincent ordered the flowers himself so that he wouldn't appear neglected. He looked surprised to see me.

"You'll be okay," I told him. "Lots of people live long lives with one kidney. You'll just need to watch what you eat and drink, avoid alcohol, and don't take any drugs unless it's something your doctor prescribes."

He stared, saying nothing. He wore a serious expression and I felt sympathy creeping into my heart, so I stepped to the side of his bed and patted his hand. He took my hand in his and returned gentle pressure to my fingers.

"Ready to come back to work for me?" He winked and licked his lips. Then he lifted the covers and patted the mattress.

"Jeez, Vincent! You'll never change, will you?" I walked out without looking back, but I heard him chuckling and then moaning as if chuckling hurt.

As the polished brass doors of the elevator closed behind me I glanced down at my hand, still sensing the brief pressure of his fingers on mine, as if he had taken my blood pressure, or applied pressure to a wound. And for the first time in seven years, I laughed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GRAVE TROUBLE

R. T. LAWTON

Even though it seemed to be a relatively simple plan, Yarnell had to admit to himself he wasn't entirely in love with the total concept. It also made him wonder why he bothered to have a partner at all. To his way of thinking, his reluctance to accept the results of Beaumont's brainstorming stemmed from a phobia he, Yarnell, had recently acquired during a job which had gone horribly wrong. His head doctor referred to this condition as *closet-phobia,* or some medical term along those lines. In any case, Yarnell now had trouble with being trapped in small, confining spaces. A definite drawback when your main profession was burglary, partner or no partner.

Consequently, Yarnell's hesitation about the proposed joint venture dealt with the very simplicity which Beaumont claimed was the beauty of his idea. As Beaumont put it, the jewelry store owner had only alarmed the doors and windows of the store. There were no motion detectors or heat sensors on the inside. Therefore, they—Yarnell and Beaumont—would merely park their van in the alley out back of the jewelry store, pry up the manhole cover, drop into the city's storm water sewer system, walk a short distance through that round cement tunnel, and then knock their way into the basement of the old building that housed their intended target.

"No alarm, no trouble, easy picking," exclaimed Beaumont. "Pun intended."

"I got that part," Yarnell muttered. "Now just how small is this sewer tunnel?"

"With your size, you'll only have to stoop over a little bit, but don't worry, there's plenty of room to swing a pickax when we get to the right spot."

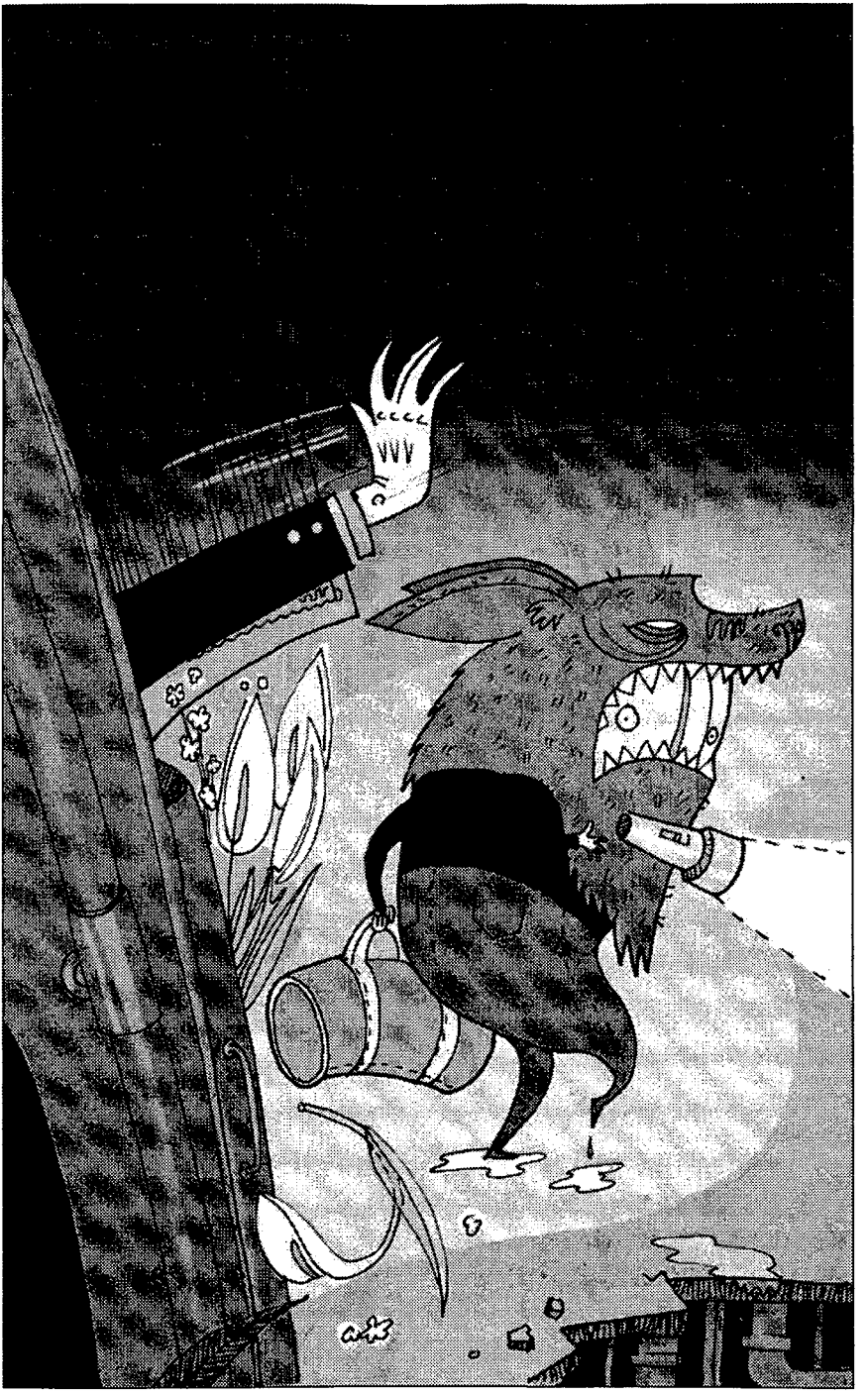
"Humpf."

Yarnell's practical side felt a slight twinge of warning as he looked at Beaumont, who was now grinning like a used car salesman closing a deal on the car lot's longtime special. But there was no way to ignore the man's enthusiasm for his own project.

"I already memorized a map of the sewer, so this'll be like a walk in the park."

Yarnell tried to stay focused. He'd been on walks in the park before, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Kelly Denato

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

somehow he didn't think stooping over so far that your knuckles dragged on the cement floor of a culvert was the same thing. Maybe if he asked the right questions, he could find a way out.

"Is there water in the bottom of this sewer?"

"Only when it drizzles, but this is late October, almost Halloween, not really what you'd call the rainy season."

Damn. He'd forgotten Halloween was tomorrow night; that meant less than sixty days left till Christmas. His extended family would be expecting lots of presents under the tree about then. Well, that clinched it. He needed quick cash, else come out looking like Scrooge's twin brother. Not much choice here.

Yarnell grudgingly nodded his acceptance.

"One thing," continued Beaumont, "the store has security cameras mounted inside on the ceiling. They're supposed to discourage shoplifting during business hours, but the owner may leave the cameras running twenty-four seven. To be on the safe side, we'll have to wear masks."

"Masks?"

"Yeah, I already got mine picked out."

"What about me?"

"You buy your own."

Buy his own mask? Cripes, he didn't have enough money to pay next month's rent and now he was looking at added business expenses just to do what Beaumont called a simple job. Okay, fine, he'd find something.

Later that evening, after much soul-searching and several glances into the kitchen to ensure that his wife would be occupied with fixing supper for some time, Yarnell snuck into the bedroom of their three-room flat. Standing at the front of their six-drawer dresser, the one with the large mirror attached to the back, he hesitated for a moment before finally opening the top drawer on his wife's side.

As he saw it, making some quick cash was paramount to his future happiness. He didn't like stealing from his wife, but if he didn't damage anything, and he returned what he *borrowed*, before she missed it of course, then it wasn't really stealing, was it? He ran his fingers over the silk, nylon, and other items inside her top drawer. Eventually, he chose a pair of dark beige pantyhose. These should do nicely.

With one ear carefully tuned to the sounds of his wife still banging pots and pans in the kitchen, Yarnell eased the selected pantyhose out of the drawer, inflated his courage and pulled one of the nylon legs down over his head. Quickly he glanced in the mirror. Everything was slightly blurry. He leaned closer to the silvered glass.

One eye stared back.

The nylon was obviously too tight. His right eyelid was stuck down in the closed mode, while the left eyelid was hung up in the wide-open position. The resulting image resembled a lecher's prolonged wink. He tried to blink. Nothing moved.

With his wide-open left eye drying out from lack of tear duct moisture,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he quickly abandoned the idea of using a simple pantyhose mask. Besides, the second pantyhose leg hanging empty next to his right ear looked outright ridiculous. He might be missing a professional point here, but he just couldn't see how bank robbers successfully worked under these strained conditions. The beige pantyhose went back in the drawer where he'd found them.

Now what?

His next money-saving idea concerned his teenaged nephew's full-faced werewolf mask acquired for Halloween. One of them rubber things you pulled down over your head and peered out of the eye slits to see where you were going.

It seemed the mask had been conveniently stashed here in the bedroom closet of Yarnell's apartment. The nephew's idea being that his parents wouldn't wonder where their wayward son had suddenly obtained enough money, on the small allowance they gave him, for him to be able to buy what they considered as totally unnecessary when a cheaper mask would do. After all, as the parents had lectured their son, Halloween was only one night out of a whole year, so why waste your money when people would freely give you candy anyway? Thus when his distraught nephew showed up at the apartment requesting a personal favor, Yarnell remembered his own hard life as a kid and agreed to hide the purloined thing for a few days until needed.

Yarnell now dug the floppy rubber face out from the shoe boxes on the closet floor and tried it on. He adjusted the eyeholes and looked in the mirror. Oh yeah, this was obviously a mask for the occasion. He wouldn't need to carry his usual gun on the job because this monstrosity would scare the bejesus out of anyone. And, for that very same reason, he rationalized that his nephew shouldn't be wearing the thing out trick-or-treating on the neighborhood streets anyway. Just a glimpse of this gruesome face was enough to give some old lady a heart seizure right there in her own doorway while handing out candy. Yes sir, he told himself, by taking possession of the mask, he was saving some old lady's life and keeping his nephew from acquiring a charge of woman slaughter on his juvenile rap sheet. Yarnell jammed the mask into his burglar bag.

If his young nephew wished to argue the point later, Yarnell could always explain that possession was nine-tenths of the law. Besides, his nephew's head was probably small enough to get the pantyhose concept to work if he really needed to disguise his face in order to rake in copious quantities of candy.

The burglary was now a go.

Late the next evening, Yarnell found himself stepping off the bottom rung of a storm sewer ladder onto dry cement beneath the alley that was located behind the designated jewelry store. He immediately froze.

Beaumont, coming second down the same ladder, missed his next rung down and stepped on Yarnell's shoulder.

"Ow."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, get out of the way. I nearly dropped my bag of tools on your head."

"It's dark down here."

"Then turn on the miner's lamp I gave you in the van."

Yarnell reached up to the vicinity of his forehead and flipped a switch. A small beam of pale yellow light projected onto the nearest cement wall. He immediately felt a little more relaxed about his surroundings, but then his right ear tuned in. "Wait a minute, I thought I heard something."

Beaumont climbed down the rest of the ladder until his rubber-soled boots touched the cement floor. The white beam from his lamp flickered on and stretched into the darkness of the cylindrical-shaped tunnel. "Probably just a rat or two."

"Rats?"

Yarnell scrunched back against the wall to make room for Beaumont to pass him in the narrow enclosure.

"C'mon, this way," said Beaumont, inclining his head forward. Three steps in, he stopped and turned around. "Better hand me the tape measure."

Yarnell felt around in his pockets. "You didn't give it to me. It must still be up in the van. Want me to go get it?" He found his feet independently inching toward the ladder.

Beaumont hesitated and glanced at his wristwatch.

"Never mind, I'll just step it off. Two of my paces comes out to be about five feet in length."

He turned back into the tunnel.

"Five, ten, fifteen, twenty . . ."

At the count of ninety-five, Beaumont stopped, took a can of red spray paint out of his nylon burglar bag, and sprayed a large "X" on the left hand wall.

"Start here."

Yarnell dropped his own burglar bag onto the rounded floor and took the proffered pickax. His backswing immediately hit the opposite cement wall. His forward swing, having lost all momentum, barely chipped the large red "X."

"This isn't gonna work."

Hand on chin, Beaumont studied the width of the tunnel.

"You may be right. Let's try our backup set of tools."

With a large battery operated drill, several charged-up batteries for the drill, and a long cement bit, Beaumont sank four holes through the rounded wall, then handed Yarnell a small sledgehammer and stone chisel.

"Okay, your turn, connect the dots and we'll get this project rolling."

With sweat soon dripping off his nose and forehead, Yarnell chiseled his way in relatively straight lines between three of the drilled holes. "It's a good thing this is old cement and crumbles easy or we'd be here all night." He handed the hammer and chisel back to Beaumont. "I'm tired, you'll have to finish."

As Beaumont banged away with the sledgehammer, Yarnell plopped

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down on his burglar bag for a rest. He alternated between checking out Beaumont's progress with the cement and trying to keep a watch on both ends of the tunnel, at least as far as he could see. Lately, he'd noticed that his light beam didn't penetrate the darkness as far as it used to. The batteries must be going. Leave it to Beaumont to forget to put fresh batteries in his, Yarnell's, lamp for a new job.

One last time, Yarnell swung his head away from the ladder they'd used to come down into the sewer and turned his gaze back toward the far end of the tunnel. Hold it. Now there seemed to be four red shiny dots at the edge of the darkness, or more correctly two pairs of red glow-in-the-dark orbs. Strange, he hadn't noticed them before.

Then two of the dots moved.

Yarnell leaped off his burglar bag and pointed.

"Beaumont, we've got company."

Beaumont swung his miner's lamp toward the red orbs. His stronger beam of white light showed two large rats hunkered down on the tunnel floor.

"I told you there were rats down here."

"Gimme that hammer," muttered Yarnell. He also grabbed for the chisel in Beaumont's other hand. "This is like being in a grave, and them guys look hungry."

With renewed fervor, Yarnell quickly removed enough cement to make a hole for a large man to crawl through. Beaumont then handed him a shovel to remove dirt. Six feet in and still laboring under the urgency of leaving the sewer behind him, Yarnell hit a brick wall.

"That's gotta be the jewelry store's basement," exclaimed Beaumont. He then passed the sledgehammer and chisel in to Yarnell. "Hurry up, we're behind schedule and I want to get out of here before the sun comes up."

Yarnell was set to complain about doing most of the hard work so far, but the sound of a rat squeaking out in the tunnel changed his mind. Three blows from the sledgehammer and the old mortar between the bricks disintegrated into dust. Yarnell pushed his way through into the basement. Loose bricks tumbled out of the wall opening and clattered to the floor around him.

"Are we in?"

"I'm in."

"What's it look like?"

Yarnell rotated his head, playing the weak yellow light from his miner's lamp over the walls. He seemed to be in the back corner of a room.

"Looks like a basement."

"I mean, what do you see?"

Yarnell stood up and dusted himself off.

"Well, there's a lot of wooden crates and some long boxes and a metal

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

worktable and some kind of machine contraption with small hoses hanging out of it."

"That must be where they repair watches and do work on the jewelry," replied Beaumont. "I always wondered where they did that stuff."

Yarnell took two steps forward as he detected a rustling in the newly dug tunnel behind him just before he heard the words, "Watch out, I'm sending our bags through."

Plop. Plop.

Two black nylon bags hit the floor at his heels.

"Do you see any security cameras in there?" came Beaumont's hollow voice from out in the sewer.

"No."

"Well put your mask on anyway. I'll be right in."

Yarnell dug the rubber werewolf face out of his bag. He then removed the miner's lamp from his head, donned the mask and tried to place the miner's lamp back on over the werewolf's forehead. With the extra material from the mask, the lamp's headband was now too tight, it no longer fit. He settled for jamming the band over one wolf ear and part of the forehead, except that awkward position forced the eyeholes out of alignment and gave him only partial vision.

"Okay," said Beaumont behind him, "I've got my mask on. You ready?"

Yarnell turned around to find he was confronting some version of Frankenstein, but the look wasn't quite right. The face seemed too flat. It was too—what was the phrase?—oh yeah, too two dimensional.

"You're wearing a cardboard mask."

"Yeah, I cut it off an old cereal box I found in my uncle's cellar a few years ago when we had to put him in a nursing home. Of course, the rubber band's new. The original one lost its elasticity a long time ago, and the cereal was stale, so the only good thing I got out of the deal was the mask. C'mon, let's go."

Beaumont led the way up the basement stairs, where he tested the doorknob at the top. The knob turned. Cautiously, he pushed the door open and stepped into the main floor room.

"Keep it quiet just in case somebody's close by the building," hissed Beaumont. "There may be some trick-or-treaters passing on the sidewalk outside."

"Yeah, I know," came Yarnell's low voice, then he followed his partner in.

They both stopped short to take in their surroundings.

"This don't look like the inside of a jewelry store," whispered Yarnell.

"You're right, it don't."

They moved noiselessly past several long boxes just like the ones Yarnell had seen in the basement, only these seemed to be set up on display for some reason.

"I hear music somewhere," whispered Beaumont.

Yarnell rolled up the right side of his rubber mask to free that ear.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I don't hear nothing."

"Maybe they got piped-in music and forgot to shut it off for the night."

Yarnell rolled up the left side of his mask.

"I still don't hear nothing."

"Forget it. Just keep your eyes open."

Yarnell figured he might have an eye and a half worth of vision, if he was lucky, with these misplaced eyeholes. He'd try, but it wouldn't be easy, which left him wondering. "So where are we if we're not in the jewelry store?"

"Hold on." Beaumont stopped by a small wooden table in the hallway. "I'll see what it says on one of these brochures they left out."

"Well?"

"Well, it says here this is a quality funeral home."

"Funeral home? What happened to the jewelry store?"

Beaumont shrugged. "Evidently I paced off the wrong number of feet before we started digging in the sewer."

"So now what? We don't have time to make a new tunnel."

Beaumont held up a pacifying hand. "No sense wasting all our efforts, we'll just have to capitalize on our mistakes and see what valuables we can find here."

"You mean rob the dead? On Halloween night?"

"I was thinking more of looking for a safe in the office. But, since you mentioned it, I'll check out the office while you have a look in the coffins."

"Coffins?"

"Yeah, I think that's what all them long boxes are that we passed back in the display room. See if anybody's got any, you know, gold jewelry or diamonds on them. Some people try to take it with them."

"I can't pull a ring off a corpse."

"And while you're at it, Yarnell, check the pockets for money."

"Money in the pockets?"

"Yeah, some mourners feel guilty about past debts or prior transgressions, so they stuff a little folding money in the pockets just in case there's a waiting lounge in purgatory."

"You're kidding me."

"That's what I say, too, so when Murph died all I did was slide a check for a thousand dollars into his vest pocket at the wake. Man, his people sure knew how to throw a going-away party. Lots of food and drink there, but if'n Murph had still been alive, I'm sure he'd have hit me up for more than a thousand, what with the vig and all his other charges for a personal loan without collateral. You know how he was, a real leg breaker. Anyway, I didn't have enough cash on me at the time."

"So you gave him a check?"

"Hey, it cancels my debt, and I sleep just fine at night now, thank you."

Yarnell opened his mouth, but couldn't find the right words to say anything.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Beaumont kept talking.

"Don't worry, if I find a safe, I'll be right back to get you. Now go ahead and search any body you find, we can't leave here empty-handed."

Beaumont and his white beam of light disappeared down the hall.

Yarnell slowly looked around. His yellow beam didn't reach out very far into the dark. Well, no caskets here in the hallway, so maybe he'd go back to the display room they'd passed through earlier. Not that he would actually steal from the deceased, but if he did find something of value, then he could always guilt Beaumont into doing the dirty work. After all, Beaumont was the one responsible for getting them into the wrong building.

Moving into the display room, Yarnell shined his fading yellow beam on all four walls. Six coffins on display. Cautiously, he approached the first one. The casket lid was split in half crossways, which allowed two openings, one top, one bottom. He wasn't sure which end was which, but since he'd rather see a pair of shoes first than to gaze directly on a dead face, he took a chance and raised the right-hand side.

Empty.

Relieved, he almost laughed.

But then he rationalized, it could always be a midget in there and maybe the guy wasn't long enough for his feet to show. Gingerly, he raised the left-hand side.

Also empty.

This time, Yarnell did give a small chuckle to reassure himself.

At the second and third coffins, he continued his pattern of opening the right side first and then the left side. All empty.

He breathed a great sigh of relief. Beaumont was right, this was merely a display room for potential buyers of coffins.

At the fourth coffin, Yarnell screwed up his courage and this time opened the left-hand side first. Empty like all the others. But, to be sure, he also flipped up the right side of the coffin. No occupants in here either.

Approaching the fifth coffin, Yarnell cheerfully threw up the left-hand lid, and immediately froze.

A body lay there on the white silk. It was a thin-looking man dressed in a nice pinstripe suit, his eyes with dark, double bags underneath were closed, and his pale white hands with long slender fingers were peaceably crossed at his chest. A glint of gold with a diamond chip showed on his left pinky finger. Whoa, right here was grave trouble.

Yarnell turned loose of the lid, took two steps back, and quickly inhaled three times. The lid stuck in the up position.

Boom.

He listened to his heart pound in *fortissimo*. The rhythm seemed to echo in both eardrums at once.

As the booming of his heartbeat gradually lessened in volume, Yarnell became aware of soft music. It seemed to be emanating from the casket. At

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

least that's where he thought it came from. He stepped slowly forward again and gazed down at the corpse.

It was wearing headphones, which now posed the question of what type of music did the recently deceased prefer to listen to as they prepared for their long one-way journey? And, was this part of that waiting lounge in purgatory thing that Beaumont had been talking about?

Very, very carefully, Yarnell reached over and pulled one of the headphones away from the ear. He leaned forward to listen.

The corpse opened one baggy eye.

Yarnell screamed and jumped back.

The corpse screamed and sat up.

"You're alive," screamed Yarnell.

"A werewolf," screamed the corpse.

Yarnell rolled the front of his mask up to see better.

"You're not really dead," he exclaimed.

"And you're not really a werewolf," replied the corpse, as he lowered his arms and seemed to collect himself.

Realizing his face was now exposed, Yarnell pulled the rubber mask back down.

"If you're not dead, then what are you doing in a coffin?"

"I sometimes sleep here," said the man. "But what, if I may ask, are you doing in the funeral home at this time of night? In any case, we don't do trick-or-treaters."

"I asked you first," responded Yarnell. "I've never heard of anyone sleeping in a coffin, except maybe for vampires. You're not one of them, are you?"

"Depends upon who you ask."

"Huh?"

"Well, if you ask my ex-wife, she'll say I sucked all the life out of her youth."

"What's that got to do with you sleeping in a coffin?"

"She got everything in the divorce, so I needed a place to stay. Unfortunately, with the expense of alimony and all, the owner here doesn't pay me enough to live on."

"You live in a funeral home?"

"Yeah, I clock out and hide in the closet until the owner leaves for the night. Then I pick out a cushy coffin to sleep in. I'm here at work so early in the morning that the owner thinks I'm one dedicated employee. Considering the present circumstances, my paycheck goes further, and it makes everybody else happy."

For the second time tonight, Yarnell found himself running out of words.

The thin man reached out and touched the werewolf's rubber nose.

"You're not really trick-or-treating, are you?"

"Not last I knew."

"Then why are you wearing that mask?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Before he could answer the man's question, Yarnell detected footsteps coming in from the hallway.

"Who you talking to?" inquired Beaumont, as he entered the display room.

Yarnell gestured a hand at the freshly risen corpse.

"This guy wants to know why I'm wearing a mask."

"Who the hell is he?"

"He sleeps here."

"In a coffin?"

"That's what I said. In any case he wants to know why the mask."

"Because we're burglarizing the joint and don't want to be recognized," replied Beaumont.

"Why didn't you hit the jewelry store next door? They've got plenty of valuables."

Beaumont threw up his hands. "Hey look, so I made *one* little mistake. It could happen to anybody. Geez, give me a break. Think you could do better?"

The man shrugged. "At least I can tell a funeral home from a jewelry store."

Thinking all they needed was a fight in the middle of a burglary, Yarnell stepped in between the two. "The owner keep any money in this place?" he asked the man in the coffin.

"You could try the safe."

"Where's that?"

"In the owner's office."

"I looked there," muttered Beaumont, "no safe. You think I'm blind *and* stupid?"

"Did you look under the round wastebasket?"

"Under the wastebasket?"

"Yeah, it's one of them round floor safes."

"I don't believe this."

The thin man in the pinstripe suit crawled out of the casket. He straightened his tie, led the way into the office, and flipped on the overhead light. Picking up the round wastebasket, he pointed.

"There."

Sure enough, a safe concealed in the floor.

Beaumont dropped to his knees and tried the safe's handle. It didn't move. He spun the combination dial. The handle still didn't budge.

"Damn."

"Exactly," said the man.

"You know the combination?" inquired Yarnell.

"Could be."

"What do you want to open it?"

"In my present circumstances, I frequently find myself in need of extra money, some of that cash that's not traced by a W-2 form."

"So?"

"So maybe you could teach me to be a burglar like you guys—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Beaumont stood up from the floor. "What?"

"—except maybe with better planning," finished the man.

"Let me kill him," muttered Beaumont.

"Look," said the man, "I'm not making any money here in the funeral home, but I can keep this as a day job because nobody will suspect an undertaker's assistant of being a burglar on the side. We're too respectable. Just take me with you on a few jobs so I can learn the ropes, then I'll branch out on my own. No problem."

"We can't—"

Yarnell quickly placed his hand over Frankenstein's flat cardboard mouth and hustled Beaumont off to a nearby corner.

"Just think about this for a minute, Beau. We're not in the jewelry store we're supposed to be in, so we're not going to make a big haul tonight . . ."

"Oh right," whispered Beaumont, "side with a complete stranger on my *one* little mistake. Some guy that you just met tonight, and him in a coffin, at that. How do you think that makes me feel?"

Yarnell patted Beaumont on the shoulder. "Take it easy. Now tell me, can you open that floor safe on your own?"

Beaumont muttered something.

Yarnell leaned forward.

"What?"

"I said no. It's one of them Rabson models, the one brand of safe I can't crack. Yet."

Yarnell put his mouth close to Beaumont's ear and whispered. "Then, if that man over there doesn't open the safe for us, we won't get anything for our troubles. Let's just humor him and see how it goes."

"Fine, but you stand responsible for him and anything he does. I wash my hands of any guy what sleeps in a coffin. I'm telling you he ain't right in the head like we are."

Putting a friendly expression on his face, Yarnell stepped forward and gazed at the thin man in the pinstripe suit.

Silence ensued.

"What?" said the man.

"It's okay," said Yarnell. "I'm smiling at you."

"No you're not."

Yarnell started to argue, then realized that the werewolf still covered his face. He raised the mask up to his nose and tried another smile, but the intended friendly result was found lacking. "Now what's wrong?"

"Oh sure, the lower half of your face is smiling, but I see wolf eyes staring at me from the top half. I'm going to need some reassurances from you guys if we're going to work together."

"What kind of reassurances?"

"Well, for a start, since I'm a partner in this burglary, I ought to get one third of the proceeds."

"No way," exclaimed Beaumont.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Give it to him," whispered Yarnell, "otherwise we get nothing and I need the money."

Beaumont slumped down onto a nearby office chair. "Okay. Do it already."

"I got one more condition," said the man. "The owner's going to know he was burgled by somebody, so I can't be here in the morning when he opens up, which also means I can't risk living here anymore. I'll have to go home with one of you guys."

Beaumont almost grinned. "He's got a point there, Yarnell, and since I gave in on the first condition, this one's all yours."

"I only got one bed," said Yarnell, "and me and the missus sleep in that one."

"I'm easy," piped up the thin man. "How about a couch in the living room?"

"My wayward nephew has to crash there fairly often."

"Got a closet?"

"Yeah."

"I'm good."

Before Yarnell could say anything more, Beaumont jumped in. "Done. Now open the safe."

The thin man walked to the desk, turned over the telephone and pointed at a slip of paper taped to the bottom. "There's your combination."

"How'd you find that," inquired Beaumont.

"There's no television in this place, so when my insomnia kicks in, I have to do something for entertainment. I've probably searched the entire funeral home. Several times."

"I'd have found that piece of paper sooner or later," murmured Beaumont.

Five minutes later, as Yarnell got to counting out his share of the loot, one thousand and three dollars plus a handful of change, he started doing the math. He had just enough money to pay next month's rent. "This isn't gonna work."

"What doesn't work?" asked the thin man.

"I still don't have enough cash for Christmas presents. We're gonna have to pull a big job before Thanksgiving."

The thin man grinned. "Excellent, already we're planning my second burglary. This is really great working with you guys."

Yarnell found trouble mustering any enthusiasm.

"Cheer up," Beaumont whispered to Yarnell, "it could be worse."

"How's that?"

"Our new burglar in training could be living in my closet."

Yeah, right. Yarnell now started wondering how he was going to explain this new pinstripe-suited closet dweller to his wife. It had been difficult enough getting her to accept the nephew's frequent overnighters, and that kid was almost normal.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Plus, upon further contemplation, Yarnell admitted to himself there was no way now he'd ever be able to enter even his own closet again without flashbacks from the prior job or else mental flinching from someone now living in there. If it wasn't one thing, it was three things or more. This meant another trip to the head doctor and, even with a medical degree from some online college, that man didn't come cheap. Money, yep, Yarnell needed lots more money. Seemed crime didn't pay enough these days, especially if you had to split the take with partners.

THE MYSTERIOUS CIPHER

by Willie Rose

Each letter consistently represents another. The quotation is from a short mystery story. Arranging the answer letters in alphabetical order gives a clue to the title of the story.

OKL UEO PYNLA HD PKYO FEG OH FQRK HCALN PKEG OKL QSX UEO—PKYO FEG UKH AYA GHP LTLG ZQOPYDW KYO LVYOPLGRL MW OILGAYGS KYO DHNPQGL HG KLN. OKL IHYOHGLA KLN KQOMEGA.

—LNYR EFMCLN

CIPHER: _

ANSWER: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Solution on page 92

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



AP Images/China Color Photo

Bamboozled

We will give a prize of $25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less, and be sure to include a crime) based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to AHMM, Dell Magazines, 475 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016. Please label your entry "December Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit.

The winning entry for the June Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 106.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TOUR THE UNIVERSE WITH THE ANALOG SCIENCE FICTION AND FACT VALUE PACK!



Order today and enjoy an unbeatable combination of stimulating fiction stories, provocative editorials, and fascinating articles, all solidly rooted in science-fact.

You'll get five of our most popular back issues for just $6.95 plus shipping and handling. That's a savings of 65% off the regular price!

SAVE 65%!

To order, just fill out the coupon below and mail with your payment today

DELL MAGAZINES
Suite SM-100, 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855-1220

☑ YES! Please send me my **Analog Science Fiction Value Pack**. I get 5 back issues for just $6.95 plus $2 shipping and handling ($8.95 per pack, U.S. funds). My satisfaction is fully guaranteed! My payment of $_____ is enclosed. (AFPK05)

Name: _____
(Please print)

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ **ZIP:** _____

Please make checks payable to Dell Magazines Direct. Allow 8 weeks for delivery. Magazines are back issues shipped together in one package. To keep prices low we cannot make custom orders.
Offer expires 9/30/09.

28C-NANVL1

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CARRYING THE NEWS FOR A DEAD PAPERBOY

JAMES VAN PELT

How Bragg got started in it, I'll never know, but I felt the green fog that surrounded him; I knew what interested him. It's what gave me a chance.

My closest encounter came when he backed his '59 Buick out of the driveway and hit my bike. It was my fault, you see, that my bike was there. It didn't have anything to do with him not looking where he was going, not that I think he could see through his sunglasses or his cloud of cigarette smoke, so maybe it *was* my fault, but BANG, my bike goes flat and all the other paperboys look at it, thinking I'm sure, thank God it wasn't *their* bike in Bragg's way.

He steps out of the car, doesn't even look to see if he's dented his bumper, then grabs the front of my shirt and pins me to the chain link fence. It's a tall fence, so my feet are maybe a yard off the ground. I can hardly breathe because his fist tightens my shirt up around my neck, and the fence gouges my back. The greenness that is him engulfs me. Not an ordinary grass green, but bad cold snot green, smelling damp and mangled, like leaves torn to bits and smeared into pulp.

Mom sighed when I took the paper route job. "You're getting so big," she said, but I wasn't big enough to hold off Bragg. My dad left before I was old enough to teach me how to defend myself. Bragg picks me up and I feel six again.

"You're a frickin' moron, Scotty," he says, blowing his cigarette and bratwurst breath in my face. He had to be really upset because Bragg usually cursed in the most interesting way I'd ever heard. Once he said in his nasty Irish brogue to a paperboy who'd bumped him, "May the seven terriers of hell sit on the spool of your breast and bark in your soul-case."

You don't hear that every day.

He lets me go. He doesn't throw me; he just releases his grip, so I drop straight down. My knees buckle, and I'm face to face with the cement.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The other paperboys stand in a half circle, watching what I'll do. Of course they think I'll do nothing. Bragg is three years older than the rest of us; he drives a car, for crying out loud, and he's been shaving since he was five I guess. Even so, I'd done a lot of reading, and I'd thought about what I'd do if Bragg ever came at me.

I felt the green fog that surrounded him, smelling damp and mangled.

It doesn't do any good, you know, the futile gesture, but I've always liked the idea of one. If Bragg was going to stomp my head for denting his bumper with my bike, I wanted to take a shot, so I roll over on my back and say, *"Go scriosa an diabhal do chroi,"* which is Irish for "May the devil destroy your heart." I'd been practicing the pronunciation for weeks. Mom told me my smart mouth would get me in trouble.

He takes a step back. My victory is in his one-step retreat, but it only lasts a second. The afternoon sun glares behind his head, making his face as dark as a cave, then he crouches beside me. I'm in his green fog again. In a low voice he says, "I'd squash you like a kitten, but I'd rather wait till Samhain. Be guarding your backside asswipe. I know your house."

So he leaves me lying on the cement, puts his leg over his big black bike he keeps at the paper shack. The joints have been welded so many times it looks lumpy and organic. He pedals toward his route, leaving his car parked on top of my bike. We watch him roll away, the gray bags filled with papers bumping against his front wheel. Then he turns a corner and is gone.

"Scotty, you're going to need a good disguise the next time you see him," says Mike, my best friend.

It is just another day at the paper shack, the last normal one for me, only I don't know it. You see, after his route is done, Bragg picks up a friend for an evening of hell raising, and they decide they want some girls along. So they go to this house where these two sisters live—one's a sophomore and the other's a freshman at the high school—except the girls' brother is there, and he doesn't want his sisters dating Bragg and his buddy. There's an argument, I hear later; one-fingered salutes are exchanged, and then Bragg and his friend give up. They climb into their car and drive off. Only the brother is still mad, so he reaches into a closet next to his front door, pulls out a deer rifle, then takes a shot at Bragg's car. The bullet goes through the trunk, through the back seat, through the front seat, through Bragg, and out the windshield.

The car goes off the road, onto a guy's yard, knocking down a mailbox, coming to rest in a thick privet hedge.

Bragg's dead.

The next afternoon, before the papers are delivered, Mike says, "Let's see the body."

I lean on my bike, trying to act cool, but my insides shiver. "Why'd we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

want to do that?" The clouds hang low. Rain has fallen off and on all afternoon.

Mike looks at me like I'm a weird bug. "I've never seen a dead person before. You chicken?"

Which I'm not, not of a dead body, anyway, but it's Bragg's dead body. I straighten up. "If you think we can get in, let's go."

The mortuary is across the street, next to the White Spot Café. Nothing like a little formaldehyde to make your food taste good, I figure. Mike leads the five of us through the mortuary's double doors. The foyer is warm and bright compared to the overcast. Our coats smell of wet street and soggy leaves. A receptionist sitting at a desk by the door says, "Can you boys sign the bereaved book?"

A minute later I'm standing behind Mike and the gang as they file past Bragg's coffin. His hands are across his stomach. Mike looks back at me, then at the corpse. Everyone is so quiet. I'm thinking that I can turn around right then, walk down the little hallway and out of the mortuary. There's no reason to see him; I didn't like him when he was alive. The flower smell coats my throat. If I put my finger in my mouth, I figure I could swab it out.

"Come on," Mike whispers. Without deciding to, I take a step forward. Bragg's nose and cheeks come into view. He's facing straight up. It's unnatural how square his shoulders are, how perfectly aligned his head is. Whenever I see someone sleeping, their head tilts a little to one side or the other, but Bragg's head is locked into a perfect line with his neck. Then I'm beside the coffin, my hand brushing the polished wood. Bragg's face is smooth, his cheeks flush, and I realize he's wearing makeup.

I bump into Mike, who isn't moving. "Looks like a mask," he says.

Bragg is only a foot away. His red painted lips don't look human at all. I'm thinking about the reading I'd been doing, the *Irish* reading, so I could counter Bragg. It's not just leprechauns, you know. Nasties filled Bragg's world: banshees, trolls, devil dogs, Fomorians, and the bad half of the Tuatha Dé Danaan, the gods of old Ireland. I'd been watching Bragg's backyard from my bedroom window for a year. I watched him dig his own *sidhe*, a fairy mound to hide in, and he'd built a henge out of sawed-off sections of telephone poles he'd cemented upright into holes and six-inch beams to top them that formed a circle fifteen feet across, and then, last Halloween, when I first started getting really scared, I watched him slaughter Mrs. Wisnewski's Pekinese. The moon had been full, and my binoculars saw it all: his naked pale chest, the hunting knife, the little yippy dog he'd tied to a picnic table bench.

The knife plunged, and out of the wound flowed the green fog. It had a shape, it did, for a second, a head and eyes, and it towered over him. Then it turned and looked at me, straight through my binoculars. I whimpered, but kept watching. Bragg chanted. From a hundred yards away, I could hear him. The green shape bent. It surrounded him. Became him. Weeks of reading later, I decided Bragg must be a Druid

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

warlock, if there ever was such a thing. There was the Irish accent he picked up after that, for one thing, and the oaks he planted around Scrap Wood Henge that grew so fast, and the interesting curses. Bragg moved in a different reality.

Mike leans over the coffin. I almost reach out to hold him back, but my hands quiver in paralysis behind me. Mike whispers, "Do you think they plugged it?" I half expect Bragg to sit up, to seize Mike by the throat.

"What?" I say. The buzz of our voices is too loud in the room.

"Do you think they plugged it, or . . . you know . . . left it?"

Bragg's jacket is taut across his chest. I figure they didn't put makeup under his clothes. What did they do with the bullet hole?

I giggle.

Mike gasps. The boys behind me whisper for a second.

"What?" he says to me.

"The suit," I say. "Doesn't Bragg look silly in a suit?"

When we get back to the paper shack, the route manager, Mr. Banion, tells me how sad he is that Bragg's dead, seeing as he and I were neighbors and practically brothers in his way of understanding things, but that the papers have to be delivered anyway, and that I'd be taking Bragg's route until Banion could hire another paperboy. The thing is, though, he says, is that Bragg's subscription list is at his house, and I need to go get it. Bragg's mom, god bless her sorrowing soul, he says, has the list, so I have to pick it up.

She takes forever to answer after I knock. I turn to go down the steps when the door opens, and she's standing there with a hankie in one hand and the subscription list in another. She's younger than my mom, skinnier, and she has a Harley Davidson tatoo on her forearm, but I'm not really looking. What I want is to get off her porch fast. She weaves a little, then braces herself against the door.

"He was a good boy," she says from behind the handkerchief. "You were one of his friends, weren't you?"

I'm not sure how to answer. In my memory I see Mrs. Wisnewski's dog in the moonlight before the air turned green, but I also see Bragg's mom, and she's just a regular person, despite the tattoo, and I think that what she wants is a hug, or something.

"We weren't very close," I say.

She looks past me to the street, her lips parted, her eyes fixed and blank. Maybe she pictures him in her mind's eye, riding his bike, or coming up the street in his awful Buick. Finally she says, "He was so looking forward to Samhain."

My skin goes cold. "That's the same as Halloween, isn't it?" I offer, because the silence unnerves me.

She is still holding the subscription list and staring over my head. The bottoms of her eyes are red rimmed. "Better than Halloween, he told me. End of the warm season. Doors open, he said."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She doesn't look at me, even when I pluck the list from her hand. When I get to the street, I glance back, and she still stands on the porch, her hankie dangling.

Bragg's route winds through blocks and blocks of single story ranch-style houses. I ride slowly, one hand holding the handlebars and the subscription list, while the other dips into the bags that hang on both sides of the bike's front wheel. A rubber-banded paper isn't aerodynamic, but with the proper flip, it turns into a propellor, flying its curved path to a porch. I take aim with the next one, cock my wrist, let it go. A long curve. Whap! It hits the step below the door, beyond the wet sidewalk, a perfect throw.

I hurl another paper, miss the porch, but hit dry ground beneath a tree. Close enough, I figure. The skin on my back prickles. Yesterday Bragg delivered this route. He threw a paper at the same house, and now I'm riding my bike in the same space he occupied. Except for the time difference, we're together. Did his paper go farther? What was he thinking when he tossed it? I glance behind me, sure for a second that his Buick, with its big, rounded bumpers is right there, its engine rumbling, and the tires mashing the pavement as he rolls toward me, one arm hanging out the window, a cigarette dangling. But the road is empty. As I wind up and down the streets, the sun drops out of sight, and on the corner, a street light buzzes before flickering into life.

I sling the last paper. It slides to a stop against the house under an overhang. End of the month. I have to collect everyone's subscriptions. Four and a half bucks to have the paper delivered to your door every day. Mr. Banion had given me Bragg's billing book. I walk up to the first door, a stranger's door, and ring the bell. An old man on a walker answers the door. He squints at me after he hands me a check. "Wait a second, son," he says, bracing his hip against the walker while he digs into his wallet. He drops four quarters into my hand. "You done real good this month."

I keep my mouth shut. I didn't do anything, but I drop the weight of payment for a dead paperboy in my pocket.

At the sidewalk I hold up Bragg's billing book to the streetlight. Already it's gone dark and the wind shakes the branches in the trees along the street. Dinner smells mix with wet leaves. I think I might collect the first half of Bragg's route, then save the rest of it until Saturday. Misty shapes swirl from the wet asphalt under the streetlight. It'll be foggy later. For a second I forget about Halloween on Friday and Samhain, which is where the holiday came from, and watch the moist air made visible by the wind and light and cold. It's ghostly and creepy, a little melancholy and beautiful. I even forget that Bragg said, "I know your house," but a creaking sound comes toward me from the unlit end of the street. It's a bike, a paperboy's bike by the sound. The chain strains against the gears and the tires grind against the ground. There's a slap as a paper hits cement. Someone's delivering papers in the dark. Maybe Mr. Banion forgot he'd

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sent me to do the route, I think, but my heart races in my chest. None of the houses on this street have lit addresses. You can't deliver in the dark if you don't know the subscribers, but the bike continues on. Another paper whirls through the air to flop onto a porch. My mouth has no spit in it.

A bike swims into the light toward me. Front tire and paper bags visible first, then the paperboy, skinny and white. He pedals by, no eyes in the empty sockets. No clothes covering the bones of his arms. The skeleton's hand dips into the bag, comes up with another paper, and flings it at the old man's house. I duck as it goes by. The bike hits a bump. The bones clack together like dice in a cup. The welds on the bike are lumpy and big. It's Bragg's bike.

My knees go loose, and I think that it can see the four-quarter tip that doesn't belong to me in my pocket, but it rides on until it's under the streetlight among the foggy forms, where it becomes mist itself and disappears. Did I imagine it? I don't think so. Ghosts are ghosts, no matter what day of the year it is.

Tomorrow is Friday, October 31. Halloween and Samhain, when the ghosts have their powers behind them, when the bigger evils are let loose. Bragg knows my house. He knows my house and he hates me.

Mike says, "So, what are you going to do?"

I grip the phone tightly against my ear. The lights in my room are out. Through my open bedroom window the full moon pours down on Bragg's slice of Ireland, little bits of fog creeping along the ground through the oak he'd planted in the spring that weren't any higher than my waist then but now reach at least to the top of his makeshift henge ten feet up, and although their leaves fell off a week ago, the branches seem muscular, bulging at the joints like the welds on Bragg's bike. The moon transforms everything into black and white. Straight shadows, alive and dark and writhing in the mist. I think of Bragg lying in his coffin. Not dead, though. Just gone for a bit.

"I'm reading," I say. "Samhain is the one night of the year when the other world becomes visible to mortals, and evil is allowed to come out. I've learned a lot about it, but not much about what to do to protect myself. One of the books says people used to put out the fires in their homes and then relit them from Druid bonfires lit on that night, or they slaughtered cattle."

"That keeps away evil?" Mike sounds like he's trying not to laugh. I'd laugh too, if I heard this from anyone else, but I'd seen what happened in Bragg's yard.

He says, "I can come over, if you want. My folks are playing bridge. They won't even know I'm gone."

"No, I've got to figure this out for myself. You don't need to get involved."

"Sure, Scotty," he says. "Is your mom going to let you go trick or treating

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this year? My dad says he thinks I'm getting too old for it, but I figure as long as I'm not in high school, I ought to be able to."

I close my eyes. Did he hear anything I said? The afterimage of Bragg's moonlit yard moves across my vision like a negative. "I've got bigger things on my mind."

Mike says, "Yeah, I forgot. Well, see ya."

The door to my room clicks, and I open my eyes just in time for the lights to come on.

"For crying out loud, Scotty," says Mom. "You've got the window wide open."

She leans across me, the softness of her belly pressing against my arm as she pulls the window down. Mom's big. When she sits on the edge of my bed, the springs complain. "Did you get your homework done?"

This is one of her classic strategies when she wants to talk about something else. I always have my homework done.

"Yeah, right after my paper route," where, for all I know, a skeleton is still delivering the news.

"Reading again?"

A pile of books I'd gathered in the past year sits on the desk in front of the window: a pocket guide to Irish mythology and another one of Irish folk and fairy tales, and a third one called *Mythologies* by William Butler Yeats. The rest were in a box under my desk.

She turns the Yeats book over in her hand. "You're just collecting these for fun, right?" She clears her throat. "You're not getting involved in a cult or anything like that, are you, not like the Bragg boy? You've been so distant lately." Behind her glasses, she looks concerned.

I watch her for a second, not sure what she's asking, then I realize she doesn't know that Bragg scared me. She might even think we were friends.

"He wasn't in a cult, really."

Mom puts the Yeats book back on the desk. My notebook is open with some of my writing about Stonehenge and druids and Samhain, and beside that are the binoculars I'd used to watch Bragg. "He was into something."

She looks at the books again. "I wish you'd spend this much time on your algebra." With a grunt, she stands up. The bed slowly fills in the space where she'd been sitting. "You're a good boy, Scotty. A little weird, but a good kid. I'll get the costumes out of the closet. Nothing like a thorough scarefest to bug the Christian right. Some of that good, old-time religion." She laughs and runs her hand through my hair before going out.

The books don't help. I'd marked all the references to Samhain. It was the same old stuff. The spirits of those who'd died the proceeding year wandered the earth on that one night, and a passage opened for more evil things. Bragg's demon from last year, I figure. Druids tried to ward them with offerings of food and drink, but I couldn't see Bragg stopping to snack no matter what I set out. They built wicker men to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

burnt, but that wasn't to stop the dead. Lots of stories about evil spirits, fire-breathing goblins, and really creepy warnings, like if you hear footsteps behind you on Samhain, you shouldn't look around because those are the footsteps of the dead, and if you look into their hollow eyes you will die.

Mom knocks this time as she comes in, carrying an armful of masks. She dumps them on the bed. "Everyone used to go trick-or-treating on Halloween when I was a girl." A clown mask slides off the quilt onto the floor. She picks it up as she sorts through the pile. A werewolf, a vampire, a Richard Nixon, an alien, a pirate. "I always liked dressing up." She puts a mask on and turns to me. It's a princess face with a tiny crown that might fit a five year old. "In old times folks wore masks on Halloween to scare off the dead."

I think about Bragg lying in his coffin, face pointed toward a heaven he'd never see. "What could be scarier than the dead, if they were walking around, I mean?"

Mom looks at me for a second, then she laughs so hard I think I'm going to have to call an ambulance. After a bit she settles down and takes off her glasses to wipe the steam from them. "Nobody has ever asked me that before. That's the most sensible thing I've ever heard anyone say about the costumes."

I pick up the werewolf mask and put it on. The latex tastes dusty. "Maybe the masks weren't to scare the dead, but to hide from them." Suddenly, that sounds very true to me because the holiday rituals came from somewhere, from something. Mom doesn't believe in anything, but she didn't see what I saw in Bragg's backyard. She didn't hear his curses or take a breath of the green fog around him. In the olden days, they believed, though. And why would they wander around outside on a night that the dead were supposed to be loose? Wouldn't they go to a church or hide in their houses? No! Because if they did, the dead would know where to find them. Instead, they put out the fires, disguised themselves, and walked, so they wouldn't be home when the dead came. I can feel Bragg's hand on my collar. His knuckles dig into my chest, and it's all I can do to breathe. He says, "I know your house."

I know how to escape him.

It is only much later, as I lay in bed, halfway between thinking and sleeping, that I have a vision of the demon that is Bragg writhing out of his fresh grave, dragging its way down the streets, past the trick-or-treaters, like a zombie homing pigeon, stupidly moving until it turns on my driveway, shambles up the walk. I'm gone in the vision, safely hidden behind my mask and the night, but the door opens in half speed. Bragg's on the porch. Mom is standing at the door, a bowl of candy in hand. I'm not home; Mom is.

I sit up. The clock says three fifteen. All is still. I can't tell Mom she has to be out of the house on Halloween. She won't believe me.

☠☠☠

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

School passes in a blur. Some kids wear costumes, but the school forbade Halloween parties a couple years ago because some school board members don't like "references to the occult." This year they're fighting to get a five-minute time for "silent reflection" before our first class, which everyone knows is a sideways attempt to get prayer into the schools. The costumes the kids do wear are lame. No witches or ghosts. I hear at the high school the tradition now is to dress as pimps or whores. The school hates that, too, but it won't get you suspended like a vampire costume might. Mom says it's the better-real-sex-than-imagined-satan thinking she finds so twisted.

"What's more likely," she says, "that a kid will get a venereal disease or join a coven?"

By the time I sprint through the two routes, little kids are already on the street, their parents moving them from door to door. It's raining again. Hoboes and firemen and cute tigers run across the lawns, their plastic pumpkins in hand. Heading for home, I lean hard on the pedals, sending spray everywhere. I figure I have only one chance to get her out of the house, but I have to play my cards just right.

Ten minutes later, I stand at the door wearing the werewolf mask and a heavy coat. The air's acquired a wintery bite, and the mist could turn to snow anytime. Mom looks at me wistfully, a bowl of candy on the table beside her chair.

I wait. For the longest time she doesn't say anything. The only way to get her to safety is if she talks.

Finally, though, when I'm just on the verge of telling her the truth, she says, "You'll be too old to go out soon. You're getting so big."

Generally I hate it when she talks like this.

Two girls wearing rock star outfits come up on the porch behind me. I drop candy into their bags and they run off. The streetlight at the corner turns on.

"Mom," I say. I'd been thinking how to word this all day. "Do you remember when you used to take me trick-or-treating?"

She smiles. "Sure, Scotty. The first time you were so small, I pulled you in a wagon."

In the dusk outside, voices cry out. High laughter. But it feels colder by the second. Samhain is the end of the warm season, Bragg's mother said. What's happening in the cemetery now? Is there mist above his grave? Has the fresh sod moved just a bit? Shifted maybe or pulsed? How much time do I have?

"Well, I figure I'll be too big to go out next year. I'll be in high school. So, I wondered, would you walk with me this year?"

Her eyes tear up. "Scotty, that's the nicest invite I've had in months." She leans forward as if to get out of the chair. "Are you sure? Wouldn't you rather be with your friends?"

"They're going to the mall," I say. My fingers are crossed behind my back for luck.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She waves her hand at the bowl by the door. "What will we do with the candy?"

I exhale a sigh of relief. "Leave it on the porch. I'll make a sign."

By the time we're out the door, night has fallen fully. The mist is half rain, half snow, but there isn't any wind. As we head up the street, I can hear the trees dripping onto the carpet of leaves beneath them.

I let Mom lead the way. "There ought to be a full moon," she says. I look up, blink against the mist. The clouds are a deep gray blanket, alive with shadowy shapes. We move several blocks. Some of the houses are dark. I don't ring their doorbells. Groups of kids pass us, some with larger figures in tow. Parents I figure. A car approaches, driving slowly, its round headlights cutting wide, white swaths in the wet air. They're not square like most new car headlights. Bragg drove a '59 Buick. I grab mom's hand and pull her onto a lawn. The car rumbles by, its driver leaning forward to look through his windshield. Not Bragg.

"You'll get your shoes muddy, Scotty."

We walk for another hour. Despite the chill, I'm sweating beneath my coat. How long do I have to keep her out? Does Samhain last until dawn, or is it over at midnight? When do the doors close? I check my watch: nine forty-five. There are fewer kids now, but I wonder about them. Maybe they're not all kids. A single figure walks toward us, no trick-or-treat bag. It lurches. I'm still holding Mom's hand.

She says, "Ouch, you're squeezing too hard."

The figure closes distance, its feet dragging on the sidewalk. I hedge to the street side to give it room.

"Nice night," Mom says when it passes. The figure looks at her without speaking. The distant streetlight barely gives illumination enough to cast a shadow, but I shiver anyway. No glint of eyeballs. No flesh over the teeth.

"Good costume," I say after it's past, my voice barely quivering.

We take a random path, climbing steadily. I haven't rung a doorbell for a while now. We're just walking, not saying much. I hope Mom's willing to stay out as long as I am. She's told me a million times that she wishes we did more stuff together. Now we're into an older neighborhood. The trees are huge, and the sidewalks to the front doors are long. I wonder how the paperboy gets the papers to the porch. With a start, I realize we're going toward the cemetery at the top of the hill, but we can't turn around. Any minute I expect Mom to say her legs are tired, or that we should head home.

She says instead, "I suppose if you lived your life by candlelight and campfires, when you didn't know what lived in the woods outside your village, you would have to believe in gods."

The temperature drops ten degrees while the slushy rain turns to ice crystals bouncing off my shoulders and the werewolf mask. Bragg is appearing in our world. I know it. Where the sidewalk had been wet, it suddenly is slippery. Ahead, at the end of the block, the cemetery gates loom. Instead of the comforting drip from gutters and bushes and trees, the ice hisses against the grass.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No streetlights. No moon. I shouldn't be able to see the cemetery gates. Every house is dark, but I can see them anyway. They're backlit. Somewhere behind them, a green glow permeates the fog. We walk forward. Mom is silent.

The green light coalesces, becomes a shoulder, then a head, rising above the gates, twenty feet tall. I want to weep. Inside me, everything turns bitter and liquidy. But there's nothing to do. No time to hide. It's too big. Its eyes are made for seeing in the dark.

I stop. The demon Bragg swings his head from left to right, as if orienting himself. Of course, the last thing Bragg knew, he was driving away from the girls' house, laughing probably, probably planning to come back later, when the brother was gone. He might be thinking, where am I now?

"Stop," I say to Mom. "Wait here for a minute, would you? I always wanted to go into a cemetery by myself on Halloween."

I can't see her face. "It's just a plot of land," she says. "A nice lawn for playing football if it weren't for the stones in it."

"I know, but I want to give it a try."

Without waiting for her reply, I let go of her hand and run forward. She has to be safe. There must be distance between us. Ice slicks the cement, and I almost fall. The demon strides toward me, huge eyes glowing green, the same sick green of Bragg's cloud. I know its smell, the slimy feel of it all around me. "Be watching your backside, asswipe," he'd said. I feel like I'm six again. I want to keep running toward it, but I can't. My legs go rubbery. My fingers are freezing, so I jam them under my arms, and rather than fall, I sit on the icy grass beside the road and wait. The creature grasps the top of the gates—I hear the wrought iron creak—then it steps over.

"You don't want her," I try to say. My throat constricts. Nothing comes out. I adjust my mask. If only there were some way to change my eyes. Maybe it will know me by my eyes! It takes a step. The ground shakes. Ice falls from tree branches behind me. Then it is upon me. Huge hands flat on the ground on either side. Its face comes closer and closer. Green-yellow eyes, like a pus-filled wound. I look up, peer through my werewolf disguise, expect it to clap its hands together, smearing me into an explosion of pain. He would break me first. His touch would be fire and stinging nettles and broken glass.

But he doesn't.

He stands. Takes two steps. Bends down to look at Mom. Straightens and walks down the hill before I can even scream.

Hissing like sand, the icy rain falls around me. My chin sinks to my chest, the start of tears brimming in my eyes.

A touch on my shoulder. "Did you hurt yourself, Scotty?" Mom helps me to my feet. I hug her, which surprises her, I guess, because for a second she stands there. Then she hugs me back. She says, "I'm getting cold. Are you ready to go home?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We hear the sirens long before we reach our block. Red and blue lights reflect off the houses on our street. The streets are too slick for us to rush, so we have plenty of time to survey the scene as we get closer.

Fire engines pour water onto our house, but there aren't many flames. Just smoke. The ends of the house are intact; the middle is gone, flat to the ground, broken timbers sticking up, water-shiny with splintery ends.

We make the cover of the *National Enquirer*, you know, with one of those pictures that look obviously doctored, like the face of the devil in the smoke plume above a burning building, except this one isn't faked. A news helicopter took it. The fire engines are in the foreground, providing the light, casting shadows the right way. Our house is in the picture's center, the two walls still standing, and over the middle of the house, the crushed middle, is what looks very much like a giant's footprint. He'd squashed our house like a kitten, someone might say. The footprint of a minor god. In the heat of the morning sun, the outline vanished.

Mom's talking about going to church. "Just to investigate it," she says.

I'm thinking I'll join her.

Solution to the November "UNSOLVED"

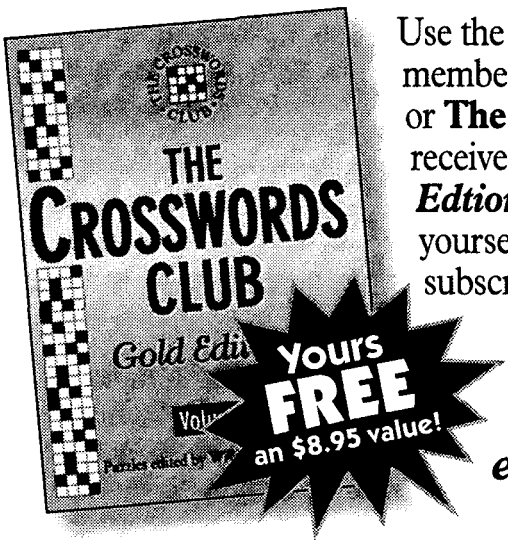
Claude Riggs murdered Earl O'Hara.

DAY	HUSBAND & WIFE	HOMETOWN
Sun.	Dan & Julia North	Texarkana
Mon.	Bart & Ida Parks	Seattle
Tue.	Fred & Kathy Quimby	Tulsa
Wed.	Andy & Gina Moore	Utica
Thr.	Claude & Lola Riggs	Wallawalla
Fri.	Earl & Helene O'Hara	Valparaiso

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FREE Bonus Book

With every elite Crosswords Club gift membership!



Use the coupon below to give a gift membership to **The Crosswords Club** or **The Uptown Puzzle Club** and you'll receive ***The Crosswords Club Gold Edtion*** book **FREE!** A great gift for yourself... or to give along with your gift subscription!

64 pages packed with some of our most entertaining puzzles ever!

Choose your Crosswords Club Gift:

- **The Crosswords Club –** Six original high-quality themed crosswords per month.
- **The Uptown Puzzle Club –** Five completely new crosswords per month from the best puzzle constructors in the country.

Order TOLL-FREE: 1-800-433-4386 (8am-7pm, EST)

Mail to: ***The Crosswords Club*** • *Dept. S, 6 Prowitt St.* • *Norwalk, CT 06855-1220*

❑ ***YES!*** Enter a 1-year gift membership as indicated below and send me ***The Crosswords Club Gold Edition Vol. 4*** (XWC) for **FREE!**

❑ ***The Crosswords Club*** (XWC)
1 year/$39.95

❑ ***The Uptown Puzzle Club*** (UTC)
1 year/$35.00

Allow up to 4 weeks for delivery of first issue. **Outside the USA:** Canada and Mexico add $10 per membership per year. All other foreign countries add $25 per membership per year.

Send to _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ ZIP _____

Your name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ ZIP _____

Offer expires September 30, 2009. **28C-NZ3CLL**

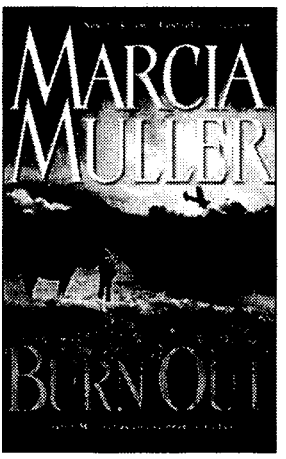
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKED & PRINTED

ROBERT C. HAHN

The strong female leads in many crime fiction series attract strong male foils, but their relationships are often difficult, producing not only romance and passion but also tension and, sometimes, heartbreak.

Marcia Muller's Sharon McCone novels have seen both the P.I. and her agency grow since her 1977 debut in *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*. Now, twenty-five novels later, McCone is married to Hy Ripinsky, who runs a powerful corporate security company, and their marriage seems on solid ground after last year's *The Ever-Running Man*. Sharon's current problem is the title of Muller's new book: BURN OUT (Grand Central, $24.99).



Sharon is exhausted and depressed. She's left the agency she founded in the capable hands of Patrick Neilan and Ted Smalley and retreated to their ranch to recharge and consider her future. She's had enough of the violence she's encountered as an investigator but she has no desire to sit behind a desk and manage other operatives.

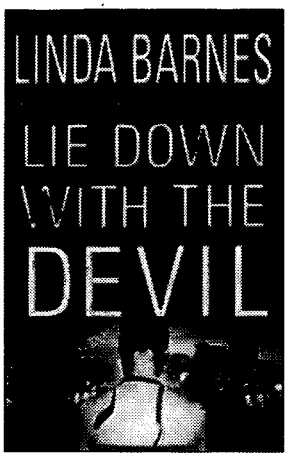
Sharon is sucked into the problems of ranch hand Ramon Perez when his niece, Amy, goes missing. Deaths follow as the search for the missing teen continues and Sharon finds her investigative instincts kicking in when she determines that the keys to Amy's disappearance appear rooted in the distant past.

Like all of Muller's best work, *Burn Out* is about Sharon's personal growth as much as the mystery to be solved. Sharon discovers new truths about herself as she develops a relationship with a cantankerous horse, learns more about her own Shoshone heritage, and begins to come to terms with her future. Muller's long-lived series is one of the strongest sustained series in crime fiction.

The relationship of Carlotta Carlyle, Boston P.I., with mob-connected Sam Gianelli has provided a lengthy story arc over several novels by Linda Barnes. LIE DOWN WITH THE DEVIL (St. Martin's Minotaur, $24.95) is the twelfth book in the Carlotta Carlyle series that began with *Trouble of Fools*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in 1987. Carlotta is an ex-cop who sometimes drives a cab when the P.I. business is slow. She's six foot one, plays a guitar, and loves volleyball.



While Boston is her usual stomping ground, she has roamed as far as Colombia, and she has battled terrorists, rebels, arsonists, blackmailers, and murderers.

Carlotta's relationship with Sam threatens to implode in *Devil.* Sam is in hiding to avoid a secret federal indictment, and Carlotta recalls both her grandmother's Yiddish proverb—"He who lives with a devil becomes a devil"—and its English corollary "Lie down with the devil"—as she contemplates their relationship. The man she's engaged to won't tell her where he is, won't tell her what crime he is under indictment for, and definitely doesn't want Carlotta to try to help him.

But Carlotta can't help probing, even if it means seeking help from a mob lawyer like Eddie Nardo or chasing down her former colleague Joseph Mooney at the firing range. She also can't resist taking on a simple case when her assistant Roz asks her to help a friend-of-a-friend, a bride-to-be who has received an anonymous note accusing her fiancé of infidelity.

Before long, Carlotta finds herself a pawn in someone else's game—but even a pawn can become a powerful piece. When Carlotta takes the offensive to escape a frame-up, uncover a fraud, and learn the truth behind Sam's indictment, she is on a mission that will transform her life in unexpected ways.

In her latest book, THE LAUGHTER OF DEAD KINGS (Morrow, $25.95), the prolific Elizabeth Peters returns to art historian/amateur sleuth Vicky Bliss for the first time in fourteen years—and to Vicky's relationship with master thief Sir John Smythe. Not only that, in this "conclusion" to the Vicky Bliss series, Peters reveals a surprising link to her Amelia Peabody series.

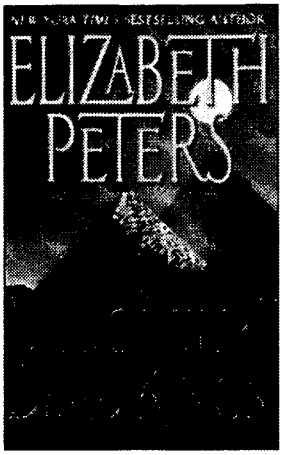
That popular series, currently eighteen volumes, began with Amelia journeying to Egypt in 1884 in *Crocodile on the Sandbank* (1975), where she met and fell in love with archaeologist Radcliffe Emerson, sharing adventures with him past the end of the first World War.

The Vicky Bliss series predates Amelia; it launched in 1973 with *Borrower of the Night.* But until this year, the most recent tale of the adventuresome art historian was 1994's *Train to Memphis.*

Bliss is the assistant curator of Munich's National Museum, working for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and with the director, Anton Z. Schmidt, one of Peters' most endearingly eccentric characters. Her love interest is John Tregarth, a k a Sir John Smythe. As Smythe, he was the mastermind behind complex and daring international art thefts, but as Tregarth he is reformed and runs a legitimate antiquities business in London.



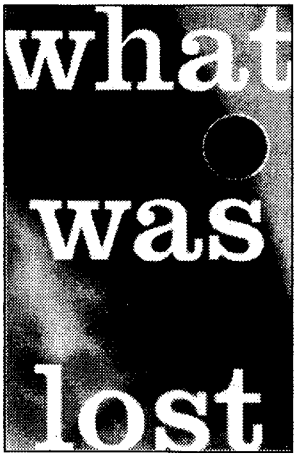
Vicky is in London with John when their friend Feisal, Inspector of Antiquities for Upper Egypt, arrives with a fantastic tale of woe. Thieves, in an operation worthy of one of John's exploits, were able to connive their way into the Valley of the Kings and abscond with Egypt's most famous king. That is, they took the remains of King Tut.

Feisal, after being assured by John that he was not behind the theft, which has not yet been made public, agrees to return to Egypt while John and Vicky begin to investigate who might be behind the theft.

Before long Vicky, John, and Schmidt are all in Egypt, though seemingly working as much at cross purposes as they are as allies as they try to determine who stole King Tut and how they can recover him before the theft results in a disastrous scandal. As more and more signs point to John's involvement in the crime, his suspicious behavior has Vicky wondering if perhaps he is not as reformed as she had thought.

Peters delivers her usual blend of adventure and romance in the long-overdue return of Vicky Bliss.

In Catherine O'Flynn's debut WHAT WAS LOST (Henry Holt, $14), Kate Meaney is a ten-year-old sleuth in 1984 suburban England. A neglected child accompanied only by her stuffed monkey and her nineteen-year-old friend Adrian, Kate wards off shoplifters, keeps files, and trails suspicious characters through the mall. But when she is supervised by Adrian on a bus ride to her high school exams, Kate becomes a case herself; she vanishes completely, and Adrian is driven out of town. Twenty years later, a lonely security guard, Kurt, befriends Adrian's sister, Lisa. Both are employees at the same mall Kate used as her beat, and both begin to unravel Kate's disappearance two decades before.



Much of *What Was Lost* is less plot-driven

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and more meditative, moving toward well-crafted revelations through the everyday details of Lisa and Kurt's life. Both are haunted by Kate's disappearance and stymied by their jobs, and O'Flynn sharply describes the placid, consumerist mall culture they serve. In constructing a wholly recognizable suburban world, O'Flynn skillfully lures unsuspecting readers into genuinely creepy moments, as when Kurt spots a small girl on his security camera one night. The journey may not be a fast-paced one, but the final disclosures feel rewarding and whole. —*Laurel Fantauzzo*

ALL POINTS BULLETIN: Three mysteries for young readers take the shelves (and in one case, the Internet too) this fall. THE CASE OF THE PECULIAR FAN (Philomel, $14.99) by Edgar Award-winner Nancy Springer is the fourth book in the Enola Holmes series. Here, the titular young female detective investigates how to free a friend from a terrible orphanage. • Teenage Scottish sleuth Horatio Wilkes returns in SOMETHING WICKED (Dial, $16.99). Alan Gratz's sophomore instalment of the Horatio series tracks the gumshoe's efforts to nab the murderer of a Scottish Highland Faire founder; echoes of Shakespeare's Macbeth abound. • THE 39 CLUES: THE MAZE OF BONES (Scholastic, $12.99) by Rick Riordan is the first in a series of interactive mystery books that uses puzzles, plot twists, the Internet, and a series of clue cards to assist young readers in solving the mystery of how the most powerful family in the world, the Cahills, first gained its strength. The deal is sweetened by real-life prizes for the first young sleuths who figure out the truth.

SOLUTION TO THE MYSTERIOUS CIPHER

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

emeraldsky zbcfghijnopqtuvwx

From "The Case of the Emerald Sky" (1940) by Eric Ambler

—Eric Ambler

She was tired of this man so much older than she was—this man who did not even justify his existence by spending his fortune on her. She poisoned her husband.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE SIGN IN THE SKY

The Judge was finishing his charge to the jury.

"Now, gentlemen, I have almost finished what I want to say to you. There is evidence for you to consider as to whether this case is plainly made out against this man so that you may say he is guilty of the murder of Vivien Barnaby. You have had the evidence of the servants as to the time the shot was fired. They have one and all agreed upon it. You have had the evidence of the letter written to the defendant by Vivien Barnaby on the morning of that same day, Friday, September 13th—a letter which the defence has not attempted to deny. You have had evidence that the prisoner first denied having been at Deering Hill, and later, after evidence had been given by the police, admitted he had. You will draw your own conclusions from that denial. This is not a case of direct evidence. You will have to come to your own conclusions on the subject of motive—of means, of opportunity. The contention of the defence is that some person unknown entered the music room after the defendant had left it, and shot Vivien Barnaby with the gun which, by strange forgetfulness, the defendant had left behind him. You have heard the defendant's story of the reason it took him half an hour to get home. If you disbelieve the defendant's story and are satisfied beyond any reasonable doubt that the defendant did, upon Friday, September 13th, discharge his gun at close quarters to Vivien Barnaby's head with intent to kill her, then, gentlemen, your verdict must be Guilty. If, on the other hand, you have any reasonable doubt, it is your duty to acquit the prisoner. I will now ask you to retire to your room and consider and let me know when you have arrived at a conclusion."

The jury were absent a little under half an hour. They returned the verdict that to everyone had seemed a foregone conclusion, the verdict of "Guilty."

Mr. Satterthwaite left the court after hearing the verdict, with a thoughtful frown on his face.

A mere murder trial as such did not attract him. He was of too fastidious

From The Mysterious Mr. Quin *(St. Martin's Minotaur).* *Copyright 1930 by Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc. Copyright renewed 1957 by Agatha Christie Mallowan.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a temperament to find interest in the sordid details of the average crime. But the Wylde case had been different. Young Martin Wylde was what is termed a gentleman—and the victim, Sir George Barnaby's young wife, had been personally known to the elderly gentleman.

He was thinking of all this as he walked up Holborn, and then plunged into a tangle of mean streets leading in the direction of Soho. In one of these streets there was a small restaurant, known only to the few of whom Mr. Satterthwaite was one. It was not cheap—it was, on the contrary, exceedingly expensive, since it catered exclusively for the palate of the jaded *gourmet*. It was quiet—no strains of jazz were allowed to disturb the hushed atmosphere—it was rather dark, waiters appeared soft-footed out of the twilight, bearing silver dishes with the air of participating in some holy rite. The name of the restaurant was Arlecchino.

Still thoughtful, Mr. Satterthwaite turned into the Arlecchino and made for his favorite table in a recess in the far corner. Owing to the twilight before mentioned, it was not until he was quite close to it that he saw it was already occupied by a tall dark man who sat with his face in shadow, and with a play of colour from a stained window turning his sober garb into a kind of riotous motley.

Mr. Satterthwaite would have turned back, but just at that moment the stranger moved slightly and the other recognised him.

"God bless my soul," said Mr. Satterthwaite, who was given to old-fashioned expressions. "Why, it's Mr. Quin!"

Three times before he had met Mr. Quin, and each time the meeting had resulted in something a little out of the ordinary. A strange person, this Mr. Quin, with a knack of showing you the things you had known all along in a totally different light.

At once Mr. Satterthwaite felt excited—pleasurably excited. His rôle was that of the looker-on, and he knew it, but sometimes when in the company of Mr. Quin, he had the illusion of being an actor—and the principal actor at that.

"This is very pleasant," he said, beaming all over his dried-up little face. "Very pleasant indeed. You've no objection to my joining you, I hope?"

"I shall be delighted," said Mr. Quin. "As you see I have not yet begun my meal."

A deferential head waiter hovered up out of the shadows. Mr. Satterthwaite, as befitted a man with a seasoned palate, gave his whole mind to the task of selection. In a few minutes the head waiter, a slight smile of approbation on his lips, retired, and a young satellite began his minstrations. Mr. Satterthwaite turned to Mr. Quin.

"I have just come from the Old Bailey," he began. "A sad business, I thought."

"He was found guilty?" said Mr. Quin.

"Yes, the jury were out only half an hour."

Mr. Quin bowed his head.

"An inevitable result—on the evidence," he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And yet," began Mr. Satterthwaite—and stopped.

Mr. Quin finished the sentence for him.

"And yet your sympathies were with the accused? Is that what you were going to say?"

"I suppose it is. Martin Wylde is a nice-looking young fellow—one can hardly believe it of him. All the same, there have been a good many nice-looking young fellows lately who have turned out to be murderers of a particularly cold-blooded and repellent type."

"Too many," said Mr. Quin quietly.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mr. Satterthwaite, slightly startled.

"Too many for Martin Wylde. There has been a tendency from the beginning to regard this as just one more of a series of the same type of crime—a man seeking to free himself from one woman in order to marry another."

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite doubtfully. "On the evidence—"

"Ah!" said Mr. Quin quickly. "I am afraid I have not followed all the evidence."

Mr. Satterthwaite's self-confidence came back to him with a rush. He felt a sudden sense of power. He was tempted to be consciously dramatic.

"Let me try to show it to you. I have met the Barnabys, you understand. I know the peculiar circumstances. With me, you will come behind the scenes—you will see the thing from inside."

Mr. Quin leant forward with his quick encouraging smile.

"If any one can show me that, it will be Mr. Satterthwaite," he murmured.

Mr. Satterthwaite gripped the table with both hands. He was uplifted, carried out of himself. For the moment he was an artist pure and simple—an artist whose medium was words.

Swiftly, with a dozen broad strokes, he etched in the picture of life at Deering Hill. Sir George Barnaby, elderly, obese, purse-proud. A man perpetually fussing over the little things of life. A man who wound up his clocks every Friday afternoon, and who paid his own housekeeping books every Tuesday morning, and who always saw to the locking of his own front door every night. A careful man.

And from Sir George he went on to Lady Barnaby. Here his touch was gentler, but none the less sure. He had seen her but once, but his impression of her was definite and lasting. A vivid defiant creature—pitifully young. A trapped child, that was how he described her.

"She hated him, you understand? She had married him before she knew what she was doing. And now—"

She was desperate—that was how he put it. Turning this way and that. She had no money of her own, she was entirely dependent on this elderly husband. But all the same she was a creature at bay—still unsure of her own powers, with a beauty that was as yet more promise than actuality. And she was greedy. Mr. Satterthwaite affirmed that definitely. Side by side with defiance there ran a greedy streak—a clasping and a clutching at life.

"I never met Martin Wylde," continued Mr. Satterthwaite. "But I heard of him. He lived less than a mile away. Farming, that was his line. And she took

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an interest in farming—or pretended to. If you ask me, it was pretending. I think that she saw in him her only way of escape—and she grabbed at him, greedily, like a child might have done. Well, there could only be one end to that. We know what the end was, because the letters were read out in court. He kept her letters—she didn't keep his, but from the text of hers one can see that he was cooling off. He admits as much. There was the other girl. She also lived in the village of Deering Vale. Her father was the doctor there. You saw her in court perhaps? No, I remember, you were not there, you said. I shall have to describe her to you. A fair girl—very fair. Gentle. Perhaps—yes, perhaps a tiny bit stupid. But very restful, you know. And loyal. Above all, loyal."

He looked at Mr. Quin for encouragement, and Mr. Quin gave it him by a slow appreciative smile. Mr. Satterthwaite went on.

"You heard that last letter read—you must have seen it; in the papers, I mean. The one written on the morning of Friday, September 13th. It was full of desperate reproaches and vague threats, and it ended by begging Martin Wylde to come to Deering Hill that same evening at six o'clock. *'I will leave the side door open for you, so that no one need know you have been here. I shall be in the music room.'* It was sent by hand."

Mr. Satterthwaite paused for a minute or two.

"When he was first arrested, you remember, Martin Wylde denied that he had been to the house at all that evening. His statement was that he had taken his gun and gone out shooting in the woods. But when the police brought forward their evidence, that statement broke down. They had found his fingerprints, you remember, both on the wood of the side door and on one of the two cocktail glasses on the table in the music room. He admitted then that he had come to see Lady Barnaby, that they had had a stormy interview, but that it had ended in his having managed to soothe her down. He swore that he left his gun outside leaning against the wall near the door, and that he left Lady Barnaby alive and well, the time being then a minute or two after a quarter-past six. He went straight home, he says. But evidence was called to show that he did not reach his farm until a quarter to seven, and as I have just mentioned, it is barely a mile away. It would not take half an hour to get there. He forgot all about his gun, he declares. Not a very likely statement—and yet—"

"And yet?" queried Mr. Quin.

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite slowly, "it's a possible one, isn't it? Counsel ridiculed the supposition, of course, but I think he was wrong. You see, I've known a good many young men, and these emotional scenes upset them very much—especially the dark, nervous type like Martin Wylde. Women now can go through a scene like that, and feel positively better for it afterwards, with all their wits about them. It acts like a safety valve for them, steadies their nerves down and all that. But I can see Martin Wylde going away with his head in a whirl, sick and miserable, and without a thought of the gun he had left leaning up against the wall."

He was silent for some minutes before he went on.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Not that it matters. For the next part is only too clear, unfortunately. It was exactly twenty minutes past six when the shot was heard. All the servants heard it, the cook, the kitchen-maid, the butler, the housemaid, and Lady Barnaby's own maid. They came rushing to the music room. She was lying huddled over the arm of her chair. The gun had been discharged close to the back of her head, so that the shot hadn't a chance to scatter. At least two of them penetrated the brain."

He paused again and Mr. Quin asked casually:

"The servants gave evidence, I suppose?"

Mr. Satterthwaite nodded.

"Yes. The butler got there a second or two before the others, but their evidence was practically a repetition of each other's."

"So they *all* gave evidence," said Mr. Quin musingly. "There were no exceptions?"

"Now I remember it," said Mr. Satterthwaite, "the housemaid was only called at the inquest. She's gone to Canada since, I believe."

"I see," said Mr. Quin.

There was a silence, and somehow the air of the little restaurant seemed to be charged with an uneasy feeling. Mr. Satterthwaite felt suddenly as though he were on the defensive.

"Why shouldn't she?" he said abruptly.

"Why should she?" said Mr. Quin with a very slight shrug of the shoulders.

Somehow the question annoyed Mr. Satterthwaite. He wanted to shy away from it—to get back on familiar ground.

"There couldn't be much doubt who fired the shot. As a matter of fact, the servants seemed to have lost their heads a bit. There was no one in the house to take charge. It was some minutes before any one thought of ringing up the police, and when they did so, they found that the telephone was out of order."

"Oh!" said Mr. Quin. "The telephone was out of order."

"It was," said Mr. Satterthwaite—and was struck suddenly by the feeling that he had said something tremendously important. "It might, of course, have been done on purpose," he said slowly. "But there seems no point in that. Death was practically instantaneous."

Mr. Quin said nothing, and Mr. Satterthwaite felt that his explanation was unsatisfactory.

"There was absolutely no one to suspect but young Wylde," he went on. "By his own account even, he was only out of the house three minutes before the shot was fired. And who else could have fired it? Sir George was at a bridge party a few houses away. He left there at half-past six and was met just outside the gate by a servant bringing him the news. The last rubber finished at half-past six exactly—no doubt about that. Then there was Sir George's secretary, Henry Thompson. He was in London that day, and actually at a business meeting at the moment the shot was fired. Finally there is Sylvia Dale who, after all, had a perfectly good motive, impossible as it seems that she should have had anything to do with a crime. She was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the station of Deering Vale seeing a friend off by the 6.28 train. That lets her out. Then the servants. What earthly motive could any one of them have? Besides, they all arrived on the spot practically simultaneously. No, it must have been Martin Wylde."

But he said it in a dissatisfied kind of voice.

They went on with their lunch. Mr. Quin was not in a talkative mood, and Mr. Satterthwaite had said all he had to say. But the silence was not a barren one. It was filled with the growing dissatisfaction of Mr. Satterthwaite, heightened and fostered in some strange way by the mere quiescence of the other man.

Mr. Satterthwaite suddenly put down his knife and fork with a clatter.

"Supposing that that young man is really innocent," he said. "He's going to be hanged."

He looked very startled and upset about it. And still Mr. Quin said nothing.

"It's not as though—" began Mr. Satterthwaite, and stopped. "Why shouldn't the woman go to Canada?" he ended inconsequently.

Mr. Quin shook his head.

"I don't even know what part of Canada she went to," continued Mr. Satterthwaite peevishly.

"Could you find out?" suggested the other.

"I suppose I could. The butler now. He'd know. Or possibly Thompson, the secretary."

He paused again. When he resumed speech, his voice sounded almost pleading.

"It's not as though it were anything to do with me?"

"That a young man is going to be hanged in a little over three weeks?"

"Well, yes—if you put it that way, I suppose. Yes, I see what you mean. Life and death. And that poor girl too. It's not that I'm hard-hearted—but, after all—what good will it do? Isn't the whole thing rather fantastic? Even if I found out where the woman's gone to in Canada—why, it would probably mean that I should have to go out there myself."

Mr. Satterthwaite looked seriously upset.

"And I was thinking of going to the Riviera next week," he said pathetically.

And his glance towards Mr. Quin said as plainly as it could be said, "Do let me off, won't you?"

"You have never been to Canada?"

"Never."

"A very interesting country."

Mr. Satterthwaite looked at him undecidedly.

"You think I ought to go?"

Mr. Quin leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigarette. Between puffs of smoke he spoke deliberately.

"You are, I believe, a rich man, Mr. Satterthwaite. Not a millionaire, but a man able to indulge a hobby without counting the expense. You have looked on at the dramas of other people. Have you never contemplated stepping in and playing a part? Have you never seen yourself for a minute as the arbiter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of other people's destinies—standing in the centre of the stage with life and death in your hands?"

Mr. Satterthwaite leant forward. The old eagerness surged over him.

"You mean—if I go on this wild-goose chase to Canada—"

Mr. Quin smiled.

"Oh! it was your suggestion, going to Canada, not mine," he said lightly.

"You can't put me off like that," said Mr. Satterthwaite earnestly. "Whenever I have come across you—" He stopped.

"Well?"

"There is something about you I do not understand. Perhaps I never shall. The last time I met you—"

"On Midsummer's Eve."

Mr. Satterthwaite was startled, as though the words held a clue that he did not quite understand.

"Was it Midsummer's Eve?" he asked confusedly.

"Yes. But let us not dwell on that. It is unimportant, is it not?"

"Since you say so," said Mr. Satterthwaite courteously. He felt that elusive clue slipping through his fingers. "When I come back from Canada"—he paused a little awkwardly—"I—I should much like to see you again."

"I am afraid I have no fixed address for the moment," said Mr. Quin regretfully. "But I often come to this place. If you also frequent it, we shall no doubt meet before very long."

They parted pleasantly.

Mr. Satterthwaite was very excited. He hurried round to Cook's and inquired about boat sailings. Then he rang up Deering Hill. The voice of a butler, suave and deferential, answered him.

"My name is Satterthwaite. I am speaking for a—er—firm of solicitors. I wished to make a few inquiries about a young woman who was recently housemaid in your establishment."

"Would that be Louisa, sir? Louisa Bullard?"

"That is the name," said Mr. Satterthwaite, very pleased to be told it.

"I regret she is not in this country, sir. She went to Canada six months ago."

"Can you give me her present address?"

The butler was afraid he couldn't. It was a place in the mountains she had gone to—a Scotch name—ah! Banff, that was it. Some of the other young women in the house had been expecting to hear from her, but she had never written or given them any address.

Mr. Satterthwaite thanked him and rang off. He was still undaunted. The adventurous spirit was strong in his breast. He would go to Banff. If this Louisa Bullard was there, he would track her down somehow or another.

To his own surprise, he enjoyed the trip greatly. It was many years since he had taken a long sea voyage. The Riviera, Le Touquet and Deauville, and Scotland had been his usual round. The feeling that he was setting off on an impossible mission added a secret zest to his journey. What an utter fool these fellow travellers of his would think him did they but know the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

object of his quest! But then—they were not acquainted with Mr. Quin.

In Banff he found his objective easily attained. Louisa Bullard was employed in the large hotel there. Twelve hours after his arrival he was standing face to face with her.

She was a woman of about thirty-five, anæmic looking, but with a strong frame. She had pale brown hair inclined to curl, and a pair of honest brown eyes. She was, he thought, slightly stupid, but very trustworthy.

She accepted quite readily his statement that he had been asked to collect a few further facts from her about the tragedy at Deering Hill.

"I saw in the paper that Mr. Martin Wylde had been convicted, sir. Very sad it is too."

She seemed, however, to have no doubt as to his guilt.

"A nice young gentleman gone wrong. But though I wouldn't speak ill of the dead, it was her ladyship what led him on. Wouldn't leave him alone, she wouldn't. Well, they've both got their punishment. There's a text used to hang on my wall when I was a child, 'God is not mocked,' and it's very true. I knew something was going to happen that very evening—and sure enough it did."

"How was that?" said Mr. Satterthwaite.

"I was in my room, sir, changing my dress, and I happened to glance out of the window. There was a train going along, and the white smoke of it rose up in the air, and, if you'll believe me, it formed itself into the sign of a gigantic hand. A great white hand against the crimson of the sky. The fingers were crooked-like, as though they were reaching out for something. It fair gave me a turn. 'Did you ever know?' I said to myself. 'That's a sign of something coming'—and sure enough at that very minute I heard the shot. 'It's come,' I said to myself, and I rushed downstairs and joined Carrie and the others who were in the hall, and we went into the music room, and there she was, shot through the head—and the blood and everything. Horrible! I spoke up, I did, and told Sir George how I'd seen the sign beforehand, but he didn't seem to think much of it. An unlucky day, that was, I'd felt it in my bones from early in the morning. Friday, and the 13th—what could you expect?"

She rambled on. Mr. Satterthwaite was patient. Again and again he took her back to the crime, questioning her closely. In the end he was forced to confess defeat. Louisa Bullard had told all she knew, and her story was perfectly simple and straightforward.

Yet he did discover one fact of importance. The post in question had been suggested to her by Mr. Thompson, Sir George's secretary. The wages attached were so large that she was tempted, and accepted the job, although it involved her leaving England very hurriedly. A Mr. Denman had made all the arrangements this end and had also warned her not to write to her fellow-servants in England, as this might "get her into trouble with the immigration authorities," which statement she had accepted in blind faith.

The amount of the wages, casually mentioned by her, was indeed so large

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that Mr. Satterthwaite was startled. After some hesitation he made up his mind to approach this Mr. Denman.

He found very little difficulty in inducing Mr. Denman to tell all he knew. The latter had come across Thompson in London, and Thompson had done him a good turn. The secretary had written to him in September saying that for personal reasons Sir George was anxious to get this girl out of England. Could he find her a job? A sum of money had been sent to raise the wages to a high figure.

"Usual trouble, I guess," said Mr. Denman, leaning back nonchalantly in his chair. "Seems a nice quiet girl too."

Mr. Satterthwaite did not agree that this was the usual trouble. Louisa Bullard, he was sure, was not a cast-off fancy of Sir George Barnaby's. For some reason it had been vital to get her out of England. But why? And who was at the bottom of it? Sir George himself, working through Thompson? Or the latter working on his own initiative, and dragging in his employer's name.

Still pondering over these questions, Mr. Satterthwaite made his return journey. He was cast down and despondent. His journey had done no good.

Smarting under a sense of failure, he made his way to the Arlecchino the day after his return. He hardly expected to be successful the first time, but to his satisfaction the familiar figure was sitting at the table in the recess, and the dark face of Mr. Harley Quin smiled a welcome.

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite as he helped himself to a pat of butter, "you sent me on a nice wild-goose chase."

Mr. Quin raised his eyebrows.

"I sent you?" he objected. "It was your own idea entirely."

"Whosever idea it was, it's not succeeded. Louisa Bullard has nothing to tell."

Thereupon Mr. Satterthwaite related the details of his conversation with the housemaid and then went on to his interview with Mr. Denman. Mr. Quin listened in silence.

"In one sense, I was justified," continued Mr. Satterthwaite. "She was deliberately got out of the way. But why? I can't see it."

"No?" said Mr. Quin, and his voice was, as ever, provocative.

Mr. Satterthwaite flushed.

"I dare say you think I might have questioned her more adroitly. I can assure you that I took her over the story again and again. It was not my fault that I did not get what we want."

"Are you sure," said Mr. Quin, "that you did not get what you want?"

Mr. Satterthwaite looked up at him in astonishment, and met that sad, mocking gaze he knew so well.

The little man shook his head, slightly bewildered.

There was a silence, and then Mr. Quin said, with a total change of manner:

"You gave me a wonderful picture the other day of the people in this business. In a few words you made them stand out as clearly as though they were etched. I wish you would do something of that kind for the place—you left that in shadow."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Satterthwaite was flattered.

"The place? Deering Hill? Well, it's a very ordinary sort of house nowadays. Red brick, you know, and bay windows. Quite hideous outside, but very comfortable inside. Not a very large house. About two acres of ground. They're all much the same, those houses round the links. Built for rich men to live in. The inside of the house is reminiscent of a hotel—the bedrooms are like hotel suites. Baths and hot and cold basins in all the bedrooms and a good many gilded electric light fittings. All wonderfully comfortable, but not very country-like. You can tell that Deering Vale is only nineteen miles from London."

Mr. Quin listened attentively.

"The train service is bad, I have heard," he remarked.

"Oh! I don't know about that," said Mr. Satterthwaite, warming to his subject. "I was down there for a bit last summer. I found it quite convenient for town. Of course, the trains only go every hour. Forty-eight minutes past the hour from Waterloo—up to 10.48."

"And how long does it take to get to Deering Vale?"

"Just about three-quarters of an hour. Twenty-eight minutes past the hour at Deering Vale."

"Of course," said Mr. Quin with a gesture of vexation, "I should have remembered. Miss Dale saw some one off by the 6.28 that evening, didn't she?"

Mr. Satterthwaite did not reply for a minute or two. His mind had gone back with a rush to his unsolved problem. Presently he said:

"I wish you would tell me what you meant just now when you asked me if I was sure I had not got what I wanted?"

It sounded rather complicated, put that way, but Mr. Quin made no pretence of not understanding.

"I just wondered if you weren't being a little too exacting. After all, you found out that Louisa Bullard was deliberately got out of the country. That being so, there must be a reason. And the reason must lie in what she said to you."

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite argumentatively. "What did she say? If she'd given evidence at the trial, what could she have said?"

"She might have told what she saw," said Mr. Quin.

"What did she see?"

"A sign in the sky."

Mr. Satterthwaite stared at him.

"Are you thinking of *that* nonsense. That superstitious notion of its being the hand of God?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Quin, "for all you and I know it may have been the hand of God, you know."

The other was clearly puzzled at the gravity of his manner.

"Nonsense," he said. "She said herself it was the smoke of the train."

"An up train or a down train, I wonder?" murmured Mr. Quin.

"Hardly an up train. They go at ten minutes to the hour. It must have been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a down train—the 6.28—no, that won't do. She said the shot came immediately afterwards, and we know the shot was fired at twenty minutes past six. The train couldn't have been ten minutes early."

"Hardly, on that line," agreed Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite was staring ahead of him.

"Perhaps a goods train," he murmured. "But surely, if so—"

"There would have been no need to get her out of England. I agree," said Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite gazed at him, fascinated.

"The 6.28," he said slowly. "But if so, if the shot was fired then, why did every one say it was earlier?"

"Obvious," said Mr. Quin. "The clocks must have been wrong."

"All of them?" said Mr. Satterthwaite doubtfully. "That's a pretty tall coincidence, you know."

"I wasn't thinking of it as a coincidence," said the other. "I was thinking that it was Friday."

"Friday?" said Mr. Satterthwaite.

"You did tell me, you know, that Sir George always wound the clocks on a Friday afternoon," said Mr. Quin apologetically.

"He put them back ten minutes," said Mr. Satterthwaite, almost in a whisper, so awed was he by the discoveries he was making. "Then he went out to bridge. I think he must have opened the note from his wife to Martin Wylde that morning—yes, decidedly he opened it. He left his bridge party at 6.30, found Martin's gun standing by the side door, and went in and shot her from behind. Then he went out again, threw the gun in the bushes where it was found later, and was apparently just coming out of the neighbour's gate when some one came running to fetch him. But the telephone—what about the telephone? Ah! yes, I see. He disconnected it so that a summons could not be sent to the police that way—they might have noted the time it was received. And Wylde's story works out now. The real time he left was five and twenty minutes past six. Walking slowly, he would reach home about a quarter to seven. Yes, I see it all. Louisa was the only danger with her endless talk about her superstitious fancies. Some one might realise the significance of the train and then—good-bye to that excellent *alibi*."

"Wonderful," commented Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite turned to him, flushed with success.

"The only thing is—how to proceed now?"

"I should suggest Sylvia Dale," said Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite looked doubtful.

"I mention to you," he said, "she seemed to me a little—er—stupid."

"She has a father and brothers who will take the necessary steps."

"That is true," said Mr. Satterthwaite, relieved.

A very short time afterwards he was sitting with the girl telling her the story. She listened attentively. She put no questions to him, but when he had done she rose.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I must have a taxi—at once."

"My dear child, what are you going to do?"

"I am going to Sir George Barnaby."

"Impossible. Absolutely the wrong procedure. Allow me to—"

He twittered on by her side. But he produced no impression. Sylvia Dale was intent on her own plans. She allowed him to go with her in the taxi, but to all his remonstrances she addressed a deaf ear. She left him in the taxi, while she went into Sir George's city office.

It was half an hour later when she came out. She looked exhausted, her fair beauty drooping like a waterless flower. Mr. Satterthwaite received her with concern.

"I've won," she murmured, as she leant back with half-closed eyes.

"What?" he was startled. "What did you do? What did you say?"

She sat up a little.

"I told him that Louisa Bullard had been to the police with her story. I told him that the police had made inquiries and that he had been seen going into his own grounds and out again a few minutes after half-past six. I told him that the game was up. He—he went to pieces. I told him that there was still time for him to get away, that the police weren't coming for another hour to arrest him. I told him that if he'd sign a confession that he'd killed Vivien I'd do nothing, but that if he didn't I'd scream and tell the whole building the truth. He was so panicky that he didn't know what he was doing. He signed the paper without realising what he was doing."

She thrust it into his hands.

"Take it—take it. You know what to do with it so that they'll set Martin free."

"He actually signed it," cried Mr. Satterthwaite, amazed.

"He is a little stupid, you know," said Sylvia Dale. "So am I," she added as an afterthought. "That's why I know how stupid people behave. We get rattled, you know, and then we do the wrong thing and are sorry afterwards."

She shivered, and Mr. Satterthwaite patted her hand.

"You need something to pull you together," he said. "Come, we are very close to a very favourite resort of mine—the Arlecchino. Have you ever been there?"

She shook her head.

Mr. Satterthwaite stopped the taxi and took the girl into the little restaurant. He made his way to the table in the recess, his heart beating hopefully. But the table was empty.

Sylvia Dale saw the disappointment in his face.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing," said Mr. Satterthwaite. "That is, I half expected to see a friend of mine here. It doesn't matter. Some day, I expect, I shall see him again. . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

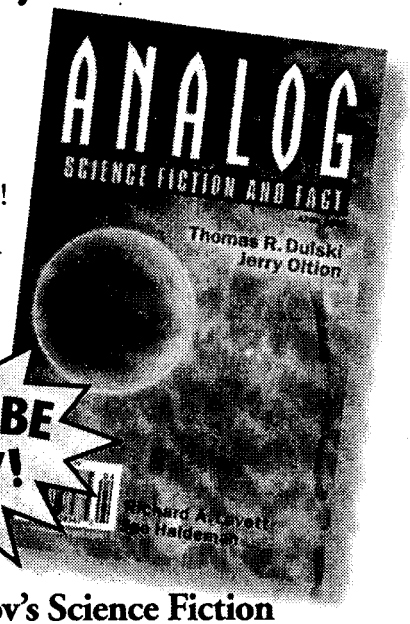
DON'T MISS AN ISSUE!

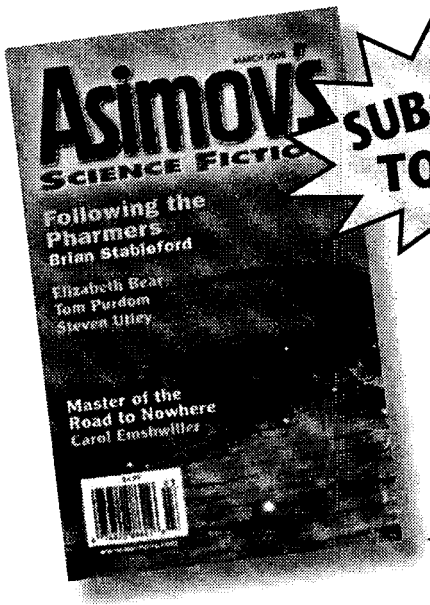
Subscribe today and have every intriguing issue of entertaining science fiction delivered direct to your door!

Analog Science Fiction and Fact

An unbeatable combination of stimulating fiction stories, provocative editorials, and fascinating articles, all solidly rooted in science fact. 1 year (12 issues*), just $32.97!

Visit **www.analogsf.com** ⟶





SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

Asimov's Science Fiction

Novellas and short stories from the leading science fiction and fantasy writers. Plus candid, no-holds-barred book reviews and guest editorials.
1 year (12 issues*), just $32.97!

⟵ Visit **www.asimovs.com**

To order by charge card, call
TOLL-FREE: 1-800-220-7443 (8am – 7pm EST)

or mail your name, address, order, and payment to:

Dell Magazines Direct
6 Prowitt St., Suite S • Norwalk, CT 06855-1220

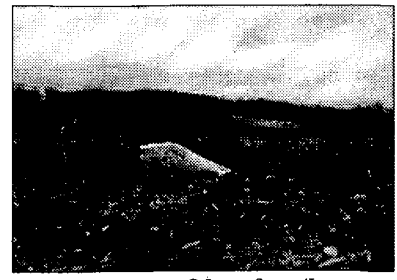
Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of your first issue. **Outside U.S.A.:** Add $1 per issue (U.S. funds) for shipping and handling. **WA residents:** Add state and local taxes to your total order. *We publish double issues twice a year which count as four issues toward your subscription.
Offer expires 9/30/09.

28C-NSFSLL

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE STORY THAT WON

The June Mysterious Photograph contest was won by Katherine Chappell of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Honorable mentions go to Andrew Burton of Prince George, British Columbia, Canada; Stacey Carroll of Elizabeth City, North Carolina; James Hagerty of Melbourne, Florida; Andrew W. Paterson of London, Ontario, Canada; Benjamin H. Foreman of Harbor Oaks, Florida; Jim Sadlemyer of Naniamo, British Columbia, Canada; Randall A. Martin of Topeka, Kansas; Ann Marie Potter of Las Vegas, Nevada; James M. Close of Toledo, Ohio; and Art Cosing of Fairfax, Virginia.



©Image Source/Images.com

GOING UNDERGROUND?

KATHERINE CHAPPELL

Charlie lay in the shallow hole gazing up. The view around him was a reflection of his life without Emily—bare and dead—but from this angle, that wasteland was invisible. He could see only the sky. In his makeshift grave, he allowed himself to feel peace.

Someone's pickup went rumbling purposefully down a nearby road, the sound echoing off the hills. Crows were arguing at the top of their lungs in the tree to the south. Mostly, though, he was surrounded by quiet.

He wondered if this cool soil bed would eventually let him understand what Emily felt wherever she was. Charlie closed his eyes against the blue and tried to enter the dark. He concentrated, straining to hear the movements of bugs in the soil, the patter of bits of earth loosening and falling around him. If he listened hard enough, maybe he'd hear her through the dirt, the sound of her gentle rotting telling him where her ruined body lay. He might hear her whisper, "I loved you, you know."

Charlie finally sighed, sat up, and scrambled awkwardly out of the hole. She wasn't going to say anything and he knew it. Besides, he had a job to finish. He might not ever find his wife's final resting place, but he knew exactly where to find the man who killed her. Jake was right here, his eyes still frozen wide open. Breaking his neck had felt good.

Charlie picked up the shovel and started to dig again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX

VOLUME FIFTY-THREE



Alderman, Mitch
Family Values . . . Jun 23

Alexander, Gary
Pickled Zillionaires . . . May 38

Allyn, Doug
The Killing Farm . . . Mar 74

Betancourt, John Gregory
Horse Pit . . . Jul/Aug 186

Black, Terry
Claustrophobe . . . Jul/Aug 175

Boland, John C.
Sargasso Sea . . . Sep 22

Brown, Alice A.
Haven't Seen You Since the Funeral . . . Dec 25

Brown, Ernest B.
Haven't Seen You Since the Funeral . . . Dec 25

Bruce, Leo
I, Said the Sparrow . . . Jun 135

Chambers, William E.
If I Quench Thee . . . Apr 134

Christie, Agatha
The Sign in the Sky . . . Dec 93

Cleland, Jane K.
Killing Time . . . Nov 4

De Noux, O'Neil
No. 40 Basin Street . . . Nov 82

Decker, Sherry
The Proper Application of Pressure to a Wound . . . Dec 50

Dirckx, John H.
Numskulduggery . . . Jan/Feb 177
Code Black . . . Jul/Aug 131
First Cousin, Twice Removed . . . Sep 86

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan
The Adventure of the Red Circle . . . Mar 123

Druett, Joan
Murder in the Hold . . . Jul/Aug 158

DuBois, Brendan
The Final Catch . . . Mar 36
The Treasure Hunter . . . Jul/Aug 116

Estleman, Loren D.
How's My Driving? . . . Jan/Feb 70
The Latin Beat . . . Jun 6
Sob Sister . . . Nov 52

Faherty, Terence
The Four Castles . . . Oct 55

Femling, Jean
Shalimar Beach . . . Sep 125

Fisher, Eve The Lagoon . . . Apr 68

Freeman, R. Austin
The Blue Sequin . . . Oct 125

Gates, David Edgerley
Set 'Em Up, Joe . . . Mar 24
Skin and Bones . . . Oct 18

Grant, Cathryn
Talking Herself to Death . . . Apr 50

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Harrison, Jodi Tamara
Black Water, Bad Heart . . . Jun 126

Hayden, G. Miki
A Killing in Midtown . . . Jan/Feb 43
The Birthday Watch . . . Sep 112

Hoch, Edward D.
Messenger from Hades . . . Apr 94
Baja . . . Sep 30

Hocking, Silas K.
A Perverted Genius . . . Nov 128

Hubbard, S. W.
Chainsaw Nativity . . . Jan/Feb 6

Johnston, Stephen Cookies . . . Jun 42

Kelner, Toni L. P.
Kangaroo Court . . . May 78

Kidō, Okamoto
The Room over the Bathhouse . . . May 119

Law, Janice
Golden Years . . . Jan/Feb 120

Lawton, R. T.
Click, Click, Click . . . Jan/Feb 59
The Length of a Straw . . . Mar 60
The Bondholder . . . May 92
Grave Trouble . . . Dec 60

Levinson, Robert S.
The Quick Brown Fox . . . Oct 106

Lewin, Michael Z.
Death Row . . . Mar 100

Limón, Martin
The Opposite of O . . . Jul/Aug 16

Lindley, Steve
Death Takes Center Stage . . . Jan/Feb 80

London, Jack
The Leopard Man's Story . . . Sep 136

Lopresti, Robert
The Hard Case . . . Apr 41

Ludwigsen, Will
In Search Of . . . Jun 58

Lundin, Leigh 8 Across . . . Apr 72

Mackay, Scott Horse Friends . . . Mar 6

MacRae, Molly Cookies . . . Jun 42

McGuire, D. A.
Catch Your Death . . . Oct 74

McLean, Russel D.
What Friends Are For . . . Apr 26
Davey's Daughter . . . Sep 70

Menge, Elaine
Best of Breed . . . Jan/Feb 130
Smart Pigs and Sour Gas . . . Jul/Aug 5

Moffitt, Donald
Feat of Clay. . . Sep 46

Myers, Amy
Tom Wasp and the Tower of London . . . Jul/Aug 40

Petrin, Jas. R.
Gang of Three . . . May 54
Law and Order . . . Jul/Aug 54

Powell, James
Red Herring House . . . May 110

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rehder, Ben
Mind Game . . . Jul/Aug 150
Roe, Judy
Murder in the Barrens . . . Apr 110

Rogers, Chris
Comes Around . . . Dec 44

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn
Discovery . . . Nov 36
Rutter, Eric
The Voice at the Barbican Gate . . . Jan/Feb 20
Rzetelny, Harriet
Death of an Anarchist . . . Sep 6

Schweitzer, Darrell
The Stolen Venus . . . Oct 4

Sellers, Peter Blind Side . . . Nov 22

Somasundrum, Mithran
Under Sapparn Put . . . Jun 62

Stack, Gilbert M.
Pandora's Ghost Town . . . Jan/Feb 203
Pandora's Demon . . . Jul/Aug 78
Guilt . . . Dec 4

Stevens, B. K.
Table for None . . . May 4

Stodghill, Dick
Panic on Portage Path . . . Jan/Feb 158

Strong, Marianne Wilski
Case Capped . . . Apr 46
Death in the Keramikos Cemetery . . . Jun 80
A Private Battle . . . Jul/Aug 94

Thorland, Donna
The Road to the Airport . . . Mar 94

Thornton, Brian
Suicide Blonde . . . Nov 109

Van Pelt, James
Carrying the News for a Dead Paperboy . . . Dec 76

Warren, James Lincoln
Cold Reason . . . Apr 4
The Warcoombe Witch . . . Nov 70

Wiecek, Mike Soldiers . . . Jun 112

Woodward, Ann
The Gingko Leaf . . . Jan/Feb 108

For back issues:

Send your check for $5.00 (U.S. funds) to
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine
6 Prowitt Street, Suite 100
Norwalk, CT 06855-1220

Please specify the issue you are ordering.
Add $2.00 per copy for delivery outside the U.S.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Linda Landrigan
EDITOR

Laurel Fantauzzo
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Susan Mangan
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ART AND PRODUCTION

Carole Dixon
SENIOR PRODUCTION MANAGER

Evira Matos
PRODUCTION ASSOCIATE

Victoria Green
SENIOR ART DIRECTOR

Irene Lee
PRODUCTION ARTIST/GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Abigail Browning
MANAGER, SUBSIDIARY RIGHTS
AND MARKETING

Bruce W. Sherbow
VICE PRESIDENT,
SALES AND MARKETING

Sandy Marlowe
CIRCULATION SERVICES

Julia McEvoy
MANAGER, ADVERTISING SALES

Connie Goon
ADVERTISING SALES COORDINATOR

Peter Kanter
PUBLISHER

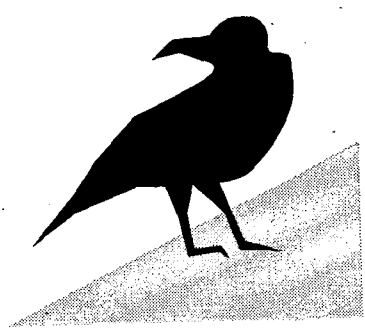
www.TheMysteryPlace.com

COMING IN JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2009

Any Means Short of Murder
Kathy Lynn Emerson

The Porcupine Tree
Eve Fisher

Nothing Is Easy
Jas. R. Petrin



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Directory of Services

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Editorial Offices

475 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016

Subscription Services

(800) 220-7443
www.TheMysteryPlace.com

Change of Address & Subscription Inquiries

www.TheMysteryPlace.com

Send your current mailing label and new address to:
AHMM
6 Prowitt Street
Norwalk, CT 06855-1220

Or e-mail us at:
customerservice@pennypublications.com

Back Issues

Send a check for $5.00 per issue *($7.00 per issue outside the U.S.)* to:
AHMM
6 Prowitt Street, Suite 100
Norwalk, CT 06855-1220
Please specify which issue you are ordering.

Subrights & Permissions

licensing@dellmagazines.com
Or fax inquiries to (203) 854-5962

Newsstand Sales

Dell Magazines, Department NS
6 Prowitt Street
Norwalk, CT 06855-1220
(203) 866-6688
retailsellers@pennypublications.com

Advertising Representative

Connie Goon, Advertising Sales Coordinator
475 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016
Tel: (212) 686-7188 ■ Fax: (212) 686-7414
printadvertising@dellmagazines.com
(Display & Classified Advertising)

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE (ISSN:0002-5224), Vol. 53, No. 12, December 2008. Published monthly except for combined January/February and July/August double issues by Dell Magazines, a division of Crosstown Publications. Annual subscription $55.90 in the U.S.A. and possessions, $65.90 elsewhere, payable in advance in U.S. funds (GST included in Canada). Subscription orders and correspondence regarding subscriptions should be sent to 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855. Or, to subscribe, call 1-800-220-7443. Editorial Offices: 475 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. Executive Offices: 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855. Periodical postage paid at Norwalk, CT and additional mailing offices. Canadian postage paid at Montreal, Quebec, Canada Post International Publications Mail, Product Sales Agreement No. 40012460. © 2008 by Dell Magazines, a division of Crosstown Publications, all rights reserved. Dell is a trademark registered in the U.S. Patent Office. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Reproduction or use, in any manner, of editorial or pictorial content without express written permission is prohibited. All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated by name or character. Submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. **POSTMASTER:** Send changes to *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855. **In Canada return to:** Quebecor St. Jean, 800 Blvd. Industrial, St. Jean, Quebec J3B 8G4. GST #R123054108.

Printed in Canada

PRINTED WITH SOY INK

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

Alfred Hitchcock December 2008

Advertise to the world's largest mystery magazine audience with our Alfred Hitchcock/Ellery Queen combined classified section. Ad rates per issue: $4.95 per word (10 word minimum), $350 per column inch (2.25 inch maximum). Special introductory offer: Buy two ads and receive a third ad FREE. Send orders to: Dell Magazines, Classified Department, 475 Park Ave. S., 11th Floor, New York, New York 10016. Direct inquiries to: (212) 686-7188; Fax: (212) 686-7414; or email: printadvertising@dellmagazines.com

AUTHORS

Check: www.barrylongyear.net Enemy Mine. All books in print.

Read Amy Myers' Latest Marsh and Daughter Mystery, *Murder in the Mist* (Severn House)

MERCHANDISE

Murder Mystery Theme Party Game Kits for 4-400 Guests! www.dinnerandamurder.com

BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

Marlowe's Mysteries. Mystery books and more, for the collector and reader. www.marlowesmysteries.com.

Treachery on the Bayou (a mystery to die for!) By: Elsaida Peltier www.elsaida.com

TRAVEL/TOURS

MURDER MYSTERY CRUISE 21st annual MURDER MYSTERY CRUISE, June 20, 2009. Nine day Bermuda/Carribean cruise aboard Princess Cruises' Caribbean Princess. Call CruiseWorks -- 1 800 876-6664

Are You Moving?



Please direct all change of address or other subscription inquiries to AHMM, 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855. For change of address, please advise six to eight weeks before moving. Please send us your current mailing label and new address, or visit us online at www.themysteryplace.com/custsvc/

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Saving Money *is no mystery!*



Get 4 back issues for just $5.95!

That's 65% off the regular price!

Expand your imagination with 4 favorite issues of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* at a fraction of their original price!

To get your value pack, fill out the coupon below and mail it to us with your payment today.

DELL MAGAZINES
Suite SM-100, 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855-1220

☑ **YES!** Please send me my **Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine Value Pack**. I get 4 back issues for just $5.95 plus $2 shipping and handling ($7.95 per pack, U.S. funds). My payment of $_____ is enclosed. (EQPK04)

Name: _____
(Please print)

Address: _____

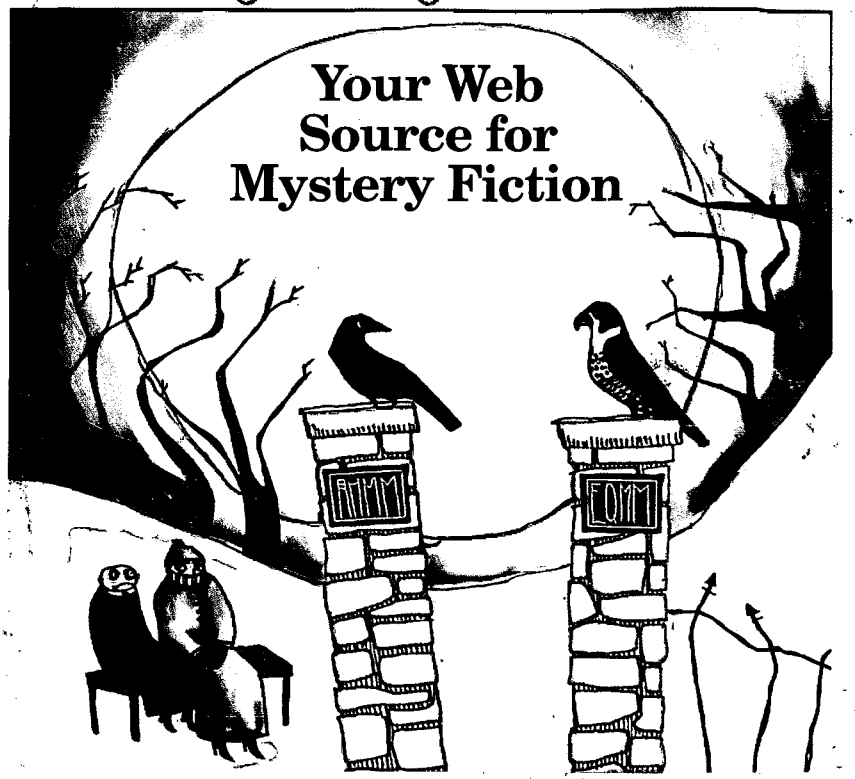
City: _____

State: _____ **ZIP:** _____

Please make checks payable to Dell Magazines Direct. Allow 8 weeks for delivery. Magazines are back issues shipped together in one package. To keep prices low we cannot make custom orders. Add $4 additional shipping and handling for delivery outside the U.S.A. Offer expires 9/30/09. 28C-NHQVL3

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TheMysteryPlace.com



Visit www.TheMysteryPlace.com, home of the world's leading short-fiction mystery magazines.

Log on and enjoy:

- Excerpts of current stories from the genre's leading authors
- Readers' Forum
- Awards lists
- Book reviews
- Mystery puzzles

All this and much more!

ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE®

ELLERY QUEEN® MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Visit us at www.TheMysteryPlace.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED